

Dotawo ►
A Journal of Nubian Studies

2018 #5

Nubian Women



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Edited by
Anne M. Jennings



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Dotawo ►

1. A medieval Nubian kingdom controlling the central Nile Valley, best known from Old Nubian documents excavated at Qasr Ibrim and other sites in Lower Nubia.
2. An open-access journal of Nubian studies, providing a cross-disciplinary platform for historians, linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scholars interested in all periods and aspects of Nubian civilization.

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1. Ammiki Nuba-n sirki Tungula-n Bahar aal poccika anda kan-nim, ne poccika an ammikin Nuba-n kitaaba an Kasr Ibrimiro poon isshi Nuba aro-n ammiki ir kar əəl koran əəllooyanero poccikare əəl oddnooyim.
2. Ele ne Nuba poccikan muǰallayane, aal poccika yaa əərngaanyatn, taariikiro, aallo, elekon poon ammik(i) ir ayin ir kanniyam pirro, poon ammik(i) aallo, elek(i) aallo poccikaa yaa əərngaanyatn.**

* Translation into Nobiin courtesy of Mohamed K. Khalil.

** Translation into Midob Nubian courtesy of Ishag A. Hassan.

<i>Armgard Goo-Grauer</i> House Decoration in Egyptian Nubia Prior to 1964	13
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<i>Doris Pemler</i> Looking at Nubians in Egypt: Nubian Women in New Kingdom Tomb and Temple Scenes and the Case of TT 40 (Amenemhet Huy)	25
--	----

<i>Solange Ashby</i> Dancing for Hathor: Nubian Women in Egyptian Cultic Life	63
--	----

<i>Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Alexandros Tsakos</i> An Old Nubian Letter from the Daughter of an Eparch	91
---	----

<i>Hanna Paesler</i> The Effects of Relocation on Nubian Women’s Health	99
--	----

<i>Petra Weschenfelder</i> A Collective Gender Perception? Female Perspectives towards Resettlement in the Dar al-Manāsir	135
---	-----

<i>Naglaa Mahmoud</i> Islam, Migration, and Nubian Women in Egypt: Muhammad Khalil Qāsim’s <i>al-Shamandurah</i> & <i>al-Khalah Aycha</i>	147
---	-----

<i>Ghada Abdel Hafeez</i> The Nile Bride Myth “Revisioned” in Nubian Literature	167
--	-----

<i>Marcus Jaeger</i> Aspects of Gender in Dongolawi and Kenzi Nubian Wise Sayings and Proverbs	193
--	-----

<i>Zeina Elcheikh</i> Tales from Two Villages: Nubian Women and Cultural Tourism in Gharb Soheil and Ballana	241
--	-----

<i>Maher Habbob</i> Community Sharing: Three Nubian Women, Three Types of Informal Co-ops	261
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From the Editor

It is with great pleasure that we present the fifth volume of *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies*. It focuses upon Nubian women, both ancient and contemporary. Nubian women, whether they were queens or commoners, Christians or Muslims, have always been held in high esteem by their communities. The contributors to this volume present articles which range from literature and wall paintings to the challenges of resettlement, from cultural tourism to traditional methods of sharing. They all focus on the ways in which Nubian women have survived and thrived throughout the centuries.

Three writers – Armgard Goo-Grauer, Doris Pemler, and Solange Ashby – very ably discuss the iconography of wall paintings, modern and ancient. Goo-Grauer examines Nubian women's house decorations before they were inundated in 1963, and Pemler researches ancient Egyptian iconography featuring Nubian women on grave stelae, shrines, and tomb paintings. Ashby concentrates on a specific dance, originating in Nubia and performed by priestesses there, which was later incorporated into Middle Kingdom Egyptian rites for the goddess Hathor.

Vincent van Gerven Oei and Alexandros Tsakos present a recently translated letter from a Nubian princess, inviting conjecture concerning the status of certain women in Christian Nubia.

Two contributors – Hanna Paesler and Petra Weschenfelder – explore the impact which the resettlement schemes have had on Nubian women. Paesler examines the effects of relocation on the health of the women in New Nubia, and while acknowledging the benefits of resettlement, she also emphasizes the serious consequences of governmental resistance to input from the villagers themselves. When Weschenfelder analyzed the results of her research among the village women living near the 5th Cataract, she found it a challenge to generalize about their hopes, fears, and perspectives concerning the relocation that was in their future.

Both Naglaa Mahmoud and Ghada Abdel Hafeez dissect male attitudes towards women through the analysis of modern Nubian literature. Marcus Jaeger takes us through the life of a typical Nubian woman as reflected in proverbs, comparing wise sayings about women from the Kenuz and Dongolawi to those from the Arabs of Western Sudan, in order to illuminate differences in male conceptions about female roles.

Zeina Elcheikh compares tourism activities in two Nubian villages both before and after the political turbulence of 2011–2013. Maher Habbob discusses the benefits of the traditional rotating credit association as he experienced it in the village where he grew up. Anne

Jennings contributes her photos of village women who still participate in these activities, and who continue to thrive in spite of challenging conditions.

We wish to thank all of the contributors to this volume, as well as the editorial board of *Dotawo*. Our thanks go especially to Giovanni Ruffini and Vincent van Gerven Oei.

Anne M. Jennings



Fatima Ismail,
Zuba, and Abba
making dinner.
West Aswan, 1986
© Anne Jennings.



Aziza, Samira, and
Gowaher. West
Aswan, 1997 ©
Anne Jennings.

Iddunya Ismail.
West Aswan, 1982
© Anne Jennings.



A young woman.
West Aswan, 1997
© Anne Jennings.





Nabiwiyya in
Kutagele. West
Aswan, 1997 ©
Anne Jennings.

House Decoration in Egyptian Nubia Prior to 1964

Armgard Goo-Grauer

This preliminary announcement will provide the outline of a publication, undertaken by Mrs. Armgard Goo-Grauer, about Nubian women's house decoration, as it existed until 1964, the year the Nubians had to leave their homeland as a consequence of the construction of the Aswan High Dam.

The publication is based on a field study of women's house decoration, which the author undertook in former Egyptian Nubia between 1961 and 1964. Since 2009 the results have been revised on the basis of further investigation in the villages to which the Nubians were relocated. The study will analyze this art form, relate it to the social and cultural context in which it was created and include a selection of previously unpublished photographs. The documentary value of this material is enhanced by the fact that its physical and social context does not exist any more.

While some of Nubia's antiquities could be saved from the flooding of the Aswan Dam through the initiative of a UNESCO campaign, the homeland of the Nubians vanished without much attention from the global community. Between 1963–1964 about 100,000 Nubians of Egyptian and Sudanese nationality had to be evacuated. Their villages were submerged by the waters of Lake Nasser, and the decorated mud brick houses and wall paintings were submerged with them.

After the resettlement of the Egyptian Nubians in relocation villages near Kom Ombo, about 50 kilometers north of Aswan, house decoration did not continue, except for a few limited and brief initial attempts.

Prior to the dam, the artistic and cultural importance of the art of Nubian house decoration was unique and unparalleled in the neighboring regions. It covered a broad spectrum both in choice of motif and style. Nubian culture was distinctive for its special combination

of Islamic and non-Islamic religious practices. Its life forms and cultural orientation were influenced by the relationship between the genders. Due to widespread male labor migration, an economic consequence of the three dam constructions that have afflicted Nubia since 1902, the women who were left behind carried the full responsibility for all labor and family issues that arose. They not only maintained Nubian tradition and culture in the villages, but also achieved a relatively high level of independence, remarkable for a Muslim community at the time. They expressed their artistic creativity first and foremost in wall paintings. This artistic creativity was a prominent feature of their Nubian identity.

The repertoire of topics in their wall paintings predominantly reflected their surroundings, supplemented by mere ornamental patterns. Plants and animals were the most prominent topic of painting, followed by the representation of human beings. Some figurative paintings were self-portraits of the female painters, recognizable in details of dress and hairstyle. Additional motifs included objects of daily life, such as sailboats, water containers or jewelry. These representations could either show the actual belongings of a woman or express her desire to own the painted item.

The Muslim prohibition on depicting the human form was not obeyed since women generally seem to have been unaware of that idea. Women's minimal religious knowledge of orthodox tenets was due to a lack of education. They were, however, rather intensively engaged with popular Islamic beliefs and practices, which were reflected in the paintings. Besides fulfilling a purely decorative function of beautifying and adorning a house, the paintings also aimed at indicating status. Certain motifs served protective purposes as well, particularly with respect to guarding against the evil eye.

Paintings could be placed on all available walls of a house or compound. They were concentrated in the bride's room, the guest room, the façade and around the entry gate. There they often underwent a harmonious interplay with the architectonic embellishments of the building and with objects inserted into the wall, like ceramic plates and mirrors.

Elaborate house decoration was especially prevalent in the most economically deprived northern part of Nubia, where it varied from village to village and featured local characteristics. Reasons to paint could be secular as well as religious, such as the construction of a house, a marriage, the birth of a child, the return of a male family member, or the feast for a local saint. Common to all paintings was a direct and candid approach to the themes, inspired by imagination, and a spontaneous way of depiction, its style characterized by bold simplicity and by a lack of perspective.

While by all indications house decoration was thriving particularly in the twentieth century, some of the patterns certainly reached further back, showing up in women's tattoos, on handicraft items, and on embroidery as well. Even some references to pre-Islamic times, as for example the Christian sign of the cross, would appear in the wall paintings.

Whereas women's wall painting as it existed in former Nubia ended with the evacuation, it attained new popularity in some Nubian villages near Aswan, which had remained unaffected by the Aswan Dam. It started a few years ago for the sake of tourism, featuring, for example, pharaonic icons or nostalgic scenes of traditional Nubian life. Professional men carry out the paintings. However, in the villages of the resettled Nubians near Kom Ombo there are no indications that house decoration might be revitalized. Here tourism must be ruled out as an impetus for a renewed creative activity.

It seems that lately the Nubian people have developed a growing awareness of their identity, history and culture. The author encountered a profound interest in her research and photo material, particularly caused by the fact that Nubians seldom possess their own visual documents of the submerged villages of former times. Thus this planned publication intends to make a contribution to the documentation of Nubia's artistic heritage.

0010 Wadi el
Arab, East shore,
Salahab, 1963. ©
Armgard Goo-
Grauer.





2369 Qurta, West shore, 1962. © Armgard Goo-Grauer.

1029 Dihmit, East
shore, Karendul,
1964. © Armgard
Goo-Grauer.





0744 Wadi el Arab,
East shore, Neja
Garwab, 1963. ©
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Grauer

0032 Kalabsha,
East shore,
Suluke, 1963. ©
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Grauer.





0051 Madiq, West
shore, Sebua, 1963.
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0557 Dihmit, East
shore, Koge, 1964.
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Grauer.





0623 Umbarakab,
East shore, Sora,
1963. © Armgard
Goo-Grauer.

0732 Dihmit, East
shore, Shema,
1964. © Armgard
Goo-Grauer.



Looking at Nubians in Egypt: Nubian Women in New Kingdom Tomb and Temple Scenes and the Case of TT 40 (Amenemhet Huy)

Doris Pемler

Egypt and the Nubians

Interaction with Nubia and Nubians was a permanent phenomenon in Ancient Egypt from the earliest times on. The Nubian homelands were located in the river and desert areas south of Egypt and in the Egyptian Eastern and Western desert. In these border zones of Upper Egypt and the wadi mouths of the Eastern Desert and the oases, a mixed Egyptian-Nubian culture existed, manifesting itself for example in the Gebelein Stelae¹ and the Nubian costumes of the local rulers of Beni Hasan, Meir and El Kab as well as in the depiction of their subjects.² Shared beliefs of a cow cult can be deduced from the cow figurines of the C-Group culture in Nubia and many traces of Nubian culture found especially in the environs of Deir-el-Bahari,³ the centre of worship for the Egyptian cow-headed goddess Hathor. Many Nubians also lived and worked in Egypt and a regular cross-border contact existed.⁴ Voluntary as well as forced migration of Nubians into Egypt took place. Therefore, constant mutual encounters occurred and Nubians were a part of Egyptian society at all levels in all times.

This claim stands in stark contrast to an Egyptological view based implicitly on the nationalist and racist ideas of the 19th century which simultaneously relies on Ancient Egyptian propaganda

1 SEIDLMAYER, "Nubier im ägyptischen Kontext im Alten und Mittleren Reich"; MEURER, *Nubier in Ägypten bis zum Beginn des Neuen Reiches*; FISCHER, "The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period."

2 PEMLER, "Looking for Nubians in Egypt."

3 For example FRIEDMAN, "New Secrets from HK64"; EREMIN et al., "The Facial Reconstruction of an Ancient Egyptian Queen."

4 PINO, "The Market Scene in the Tomb of Khaemhat (TT 57)."

against foreigners. Their theory of cultural contact and intercultural exchange assumed a superior Egyptian culture and a fast Egyptianisation of all people and things foreign. Lately, such views have become challenged and new interpretive models emerge.⁵

In this paper, I want to support the idea of a multicultural Egyptian society from an iconographic point of view. For that, I have chosen New Kingdom depictions of Nubian women. Whereas the depictions of Nubian men are subject to Egyptian propaganda, the depictions of women form a rather small separate group and avoid propagandistic stereotypes. During the Egyptian New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 BCE), tomb and temple scenes depict Nubian women coming to Egypt to stay. The moment of their arrival is the moment they become visible. Their distinct appearance becomes invisible when the women disappear into Egyptian iconography or are not pictured at all. This paper introduces the specific iconography of Nubian women, giving an overview and a comparison of the New Kingdom sources. A special focus will be on the interesting and unique depictions of Nubian women in the tombs of the Egyptian nobles Rekhmire (TT 100) and Amenemhet Huy (TT 40).

Iconography of Nubian women – New Kingdom scenes from temples and tombs

In the Egyptian tomb and temple scenes of the New Kingdom showing Nubians⁶ we see Nubians bringing a share of their wealth. But we also learn that children of Nubian rulers came to Egypt to be part of the Egyptian royal court; we see Nubians delivering adversaries of other Nubian groups as presents to Egypt; and we see Nubians taken as prisoners of the many wars the Egyptians fought in the south. In these scenes, Nubian women are rarely depicted. They appear in less than half of the Nubian scenes.

Nubian women can be distinguished by several iconographic peculiarities. Identifying Nubian markers include clothing, hairstyle, skin colour and personal ornament, jewelry and body ornaments. Additional markers can be found in the depiction of facial and bodily features. Two or more of these features have to appear together to identify a person as Nubian. But not only Nubian personal markers are significant: there are also other criteria such as a certain choice of materials or food preferences. The Nubian woman is pictured with brown or black skin color.⁷ Her hairstyle is often

5 MANLEY, “Petrie’s Revolutions”; PELT, “Revising Egypto-Nubian Relations in New Kingdom Lower Nubia.”

6 Out of 55 scenes of foreign “tribute,” 20 show Nubians. HALLMANN, *Die Tributscenen des Neuen Reiches*, p. 264.

7 LOHWASSER, “Haut als Medium im Antiken Nordostafrika,” p. 528 remarks on the culturally determined depiction in contrast to a natural depiction: “Bereits die Darstellung der Haut

short,⁸ she wears a long skirt often made from leather,⁹ and her upper body is naked. Women with children are often shown with pendulous breasts.¹⁰

Nubian women in Egyptian art appear in two different spheres. They are linked to dancing and singing, which is related to the cult of goddesses, especially Hathor. As this field is also linked to the realms of youth and beauty, Nubian women and young girls can be found as decorative parts of toiletry, for example as mirror handles (Plate 1). They often show imagery related to Hathor or her dancers and singers. In the same context female figurines also often show Nubian iconographic features.

The other sphere where Nubian women are depicted is in the context of “tribute scenes.” During the New Kingdom, Nubian women are depicted in temple and tomb scenes (Table 1).¹¹ Taking a closer look, many of the scenes can be related to a martial context. They are part of larger scenes illustrating Egyptian Campaigns against Nubia. Many such campaigns were conducted during the New Kingdom.¹² The pictures show different events, which are chronologically related.

One scene pictured in temples shows the news of an Egyptian campaign coming to the Nubian villages (Table 1, no. 11, 12a, 13, 14). This scene of war intruding on a seemingly peaceful pastoral life is shown next to the scenes of battle.¹³ All of these scenes except the one depicted in Medinet Habu (Table 1, no. 14) are located in newly built Egyptian temples in Nubia and may have served to remind the Nubians of the consequences of a rebellion against Egypt.

ist im Alten Ägypten kulturell determiniert. Die Farbe der Haut informiert z.B. über das Geschlecht. Schon hier wird das biologisch Gegebene kulturell überformt und zur Botschaft: Frauen werden in der ägyptischen Kunst gelblich, Männer rotbraun gezeigt...So wie das Geschlecht kann auch die Ethnie nahezu allein durch die Farbe der Haut dargestellt werden, Südländer werden dunkelbraun, in Abstufungen bis schwarz präsentiert.”

- 8 In contrast to an Egyptian preference for long hair and wigs: for the New Kingdom see ROBINS, “Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt, c. 1480–1350 B.C.,” pp. 63–68; a short hairstyle evolves during the 18th dynasty in Egypt into the “Nubian wig,” see ALDRED, “Hair Styles and History.”
- 9 Leather was a material much in use in Nubia, less so in Egypt: in general DRIEL-MURRAY, “Leatherwork and Skin Products.”
- 10 The hanging breasts in the depiction of Nubian women might have shown the high esteem and status of the mother, who has nursed many children; see for example the C-Group figurine in WILDUNG, *Sudan*, no. 43 or the depiction of a Meroitic Ba Statue from Lower Nubia, *ibid.*, no. 307. In Egypt, the depiction of hanging breasts also appears in the iconography of the Nile gods and with the goddess Taweret, both signifying fertility.
- 11 For an overview of the scenes, see DRENKHahn, *Darstellungen von Negerinnen in Ägypten*, p. 165 Liste V; for a discussion of the iconography, pp. 73–80; for the discussion of the “jnw- tribute” see HALLMANN, *Die Tributzene des Neuen Reiches*, pp. 323–334.
- 12 For an overview of the political history of Egypt’s conquest of Nubia in the New Kingdom, see for example SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH, *Ägypten und Nubien*, pp. 141–245; TÖRÖK, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 157–208.
- 13 No. 1 (Table 1) from the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut shows a very similar motif, but without the war scenes.

A second scene shows the captured women and children brought to Egypt as spoils of war, along with the other “booty.” In temples and private tombs, the Nubians are part of long processions of people. Women and children walk alongside the other prisoners and loot. The children are led along or carried in baskets on the women’s backs.¹⁴ The women do not carry additional items and it becomes clear they do not come along voluntarily. Some of the scenes show the women as prisoners being led along by armed men (Table 1, nos. 3, 4a) or bound by the neck (Table 1, no. 8).¹⁵ The texts related to no. 2 from the temple of Armant and no. 3 from the tomb of Ineni (TT 81) describe them as booty (kfa and sqr-anxw). The pictures suggest that these women and children are seen as the human part of the tribute. This view is confirmed by contemporary textual sources stating that men, women and children were seen as part of the “deliveries.”¹⁶ The scenes show Nubian women of different ages and different status. A high status can be seen in nos. 4a and 10a from the tombs of Amenemhet Huy (TT 40) and Rekhmire (TT 100), where the inscriptions speak of children of the rulers (msw wrw). Furthermore, access to jewelry, as seen with the women shown in docs. 6 and 7, probably also indicates a higher status.¹⁷

The tombs of Rekhmire (Table 1, no. 4, TT 100) and Amenemhet Huy (Table 1, no. 10, TT 40) are among the most lavishly decorated private tombs in Thebes. They are also among the few depicting Nubian women. Both men lived during the 18th dynasty (ca. 1550–1300 BCE), which is often seen as the peak of Ancient Egyptian civilisation, the time of greatest power and wealth. Rekhmire, coming from a powerful family, held the office of the vizier, the highest rank in Ancient Egyptian administration, under pharaoh Thutmose III (around 1400 BCE) and in the early years of his successor Amenhotep II. From the tomb of Rekhmire, two scenes will be discussed. One shows captured Nubian noblewomen to be assigned as mrw-workers for the temple of Amun (Plate 2; Table 1, no. 4a). The other scene depicts the fate of these women when the mrw-workers are shown presenting the products of their work and their children to be inspected (Plate 3; Table 1, no. 4b).

14 Only no. 4a and b (Table 1) from TT 100 show a child sitting on the shoulders. This depiction is usually seen only with Syrian children and might therefore be a case of transference; see as well no. 7 (Table 1), where a man leads a child by the hand; MATIĆ, “Children on the Move,” pp. 378–379.

15 The women walking at the end of the row in no. 10a (Table 1) from TT 40 are walking behind prisoners, but seem to belong to the same group of people.

16 “They [the Nubians] offer you their persons and their children,” Stela Amenhotep III, TÖRÖK, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 157. Papyrus Koller speaks of “the bringing of tall Terek people [...] with fans of gold [...] and numerous Nubians of all kinds,” cited in *ibid.*, p. 274.

17 DRENKHahn, *Darstellungen von Neger in Ägypten*, pp. 73–80 gives a detailed description of the iconographic details.

Amenemhet Huy comes from another era of the 18th dynasty. He held his office as viceroy of Nubia and overseer of the southern countries under Tutanchamun (ca. 1330 BCE). This was a time of crisis for Egypt, when it resumed its power centre in Thebes after the break in tradition made by pharaoh Akhenaton. He had changed the religion and built his new capital Amarna in the Eastern Desert. In this unstable time Amenhotep Huy became responsible for the deliveries from the southern countries, which were very important both economically and also in terms of status. His tomb shows in great detail the story of his appointment to office and his first travel to Nubia to take care of the deliveries.¹⁸ The scenes from the tomb of Amenemhet Huy show Nubian princesses brought to Egypt to be part of the royal court (Plates 4, 5; Table 1, no. 10a) and the mixed Egyptian-Nubian population of Faras bringing their royalties (Plate 8; Table 1, no. 10b).

Nubian Children

Nubian children, girls and boys alike, are shown with a distinct hairstyle (Plates 1, 4, 5). The hair is shaven, leaving only a few tufts on the side and on the forehead.¹⁹ Older children are led along by the hand and in some cases (Table 1, nos. 3, 4b, 6, 7) older children walk alone. In no. 3 (Table 1) from the tomb of Ineni (TT 81) a girl is depicted wearing a long skirt,²⁰ but is still being led by the hand. Some fragments from the tomb of Sobekhotep (TT 63; Table 1, no. 7) show children elaborately adorned. A girl is pictured naked and walking alone. She wears an elaborate necklace, earrings and an amulet around her waist.²¹ Another child led along by the hand is wearing a necklace, another one earrings and a necklace.²² In the tomb of Rekhmire a single woman or girl is pictured at the end of a row of captured Nubians (Plate 2). She wears a short loincloth bound on the back. Her hairstyle is shown as a braid (similar to the women in Table 1, no. 6). Before her, a group of three women is pictured. They do not have children with them and wear the customary long

18 KAWAI, "The Administrators and Notables in Nubia under Tutankhamun."

19 One of the earliest examples, probably from the 6th dyn.: "Head of a Nubian Girl," Museum of Fine Arts Boston 24.978; for a dancing boy with the tuft hairstyle: BRACK & BRACK, *Das Grab des Haremheb*, pl. 12. One faience statue of a grown woman with tuft haircut breastfeeding a baboon might be interpreted as the depiction of a local Nubian goddess. Edinburgh A.1951.131: ALDRED, *Jewels of the Pharaohs*, no. 147.

20 Described as a "black skirt patterned with white spots" in DAVIES, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes*, p. 30, ann. 64.

21 DZIOBEK & ABDEL RAZIQ, *Das Grab des Sobekhotep*, pl. 2a; p. 33. As the child led by a man is the only known such example, it might be considered as transference. None of the children is pictured as male; in the cases in which a gender is indicated, the children are all female. This stands in contrast to the depiction of Syrian children brought to Egypt. They are mostly male. MATIĆ, "Children on the Move," p. 380.

22 WRZESINSKI, *Atlas zur Altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, p. 56 b, c.

Nubian skirt. They are pictured with hair that reaches the shoulder. Behind them, some persons with “Nubian wigs” are shown, wearing necklaces.

From these different depictions of Nubian children, young women and adults, it seems that the ancient Egyptians recognized and deliberately depicted different status in age and position in society with different iconographic markers. As we do not have additional information about the significance of different clothing with different groups of Nubians, the already discussed presence or absence of jewelry and the differences in hairstyle remain the only clues for us.

To summarize, these are the known iconographic details. Children and young adult dancers and musicians are shown naked and with the tuft hairstyle. In general, their sex is not indicated. This might reflect a Nubian cultural preference to not distinguish between children's genders. Adult women without children are depicted with a long skirt and longer hair (Table 1, no. 4a). The transitional stage between child and young adult remains inconsistent in iconography, and might therefore mirror a reality in which the female transition to adulthood is either individual or not recognized by the Egyptian painters.²³ Women with children are depicted with short hair, pendulous breasts and long skirts, the pendulous breasts reflecting the high status of motherhood in Nubian culture.

Where Did the Princes and Princesses Go?

In two scenes from the tombs of Rekhmire and Amenemhet Huy (Plates 2, 3, 4; Table 1, nos. 4a, 10a) Nubian women are depicted as part of a group described as the children of the rulers of foreign countries (msw wrw).²⁴ Apart from the matching inscription, the context of the two scenes is markedly different. In the tomb of Rekhmire (Plate 2; Table 1, no. 4a), the related text describes the children of the rulers as loot to be assigned as workers (mrt)²⁵ to the temple of Amun: “Bringing forward children of the chiefs of the southern lands [...] brought as the pick of the booty of His Majesty [...] to fill the workshops and to be serfs of the temple estate of his

23 It seems that with young children the gender is not important. The entrance to the adult world is often celebrated ritually at a certain age for boys, and for girls the transition is more individual. LOHWASSER, “Gibt es mehr als zwei Geschlechter?,” p. 35.

24 They are pictured as adult women without children. The term “children of the ruler” merely defines their status as princes and princesses. Msw wrw are also shown in the Heb Sed festivities of Amenhotep III, where they pour libations. They are pictured as Egyptians but described as msw wrw: EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *The Tomb of Kheruef*, pp. 45–46; pls. 24, 31, 32. However, I do not agree with the explanation by Allam that msw ist to be regarded as a synonym for products. ALLAM, “Msw = Kinder/Volksgruppe/Produkte/Abgaben.”

25 “Hörige,” doing work in agriculture and weaving: Erman & Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 2: p. 106. See also MATIĆ, “Children on the Move,” with further literature.

father Amun.”²⁶ The picture shows them as prisoners led along and followed by armed men.

A rather different picture can be seen in the tomb of Amenemhet Huy (Plates 4, 5; Table 1, no. 10a). Here, the *msw wrw* do not come to Egypt by force. They are nevertheless part of the presents for the king, coming to the royal court of Egypt to stay. Where exactly they went is not very clear: they were probably assigned to the royal household. The main Egyptian terms used here are *ipt*, *xnr*, and *kAp*. To get a clearer idea of the respective meaning of these terms, it is useful to relate them to people, places or institutions. Therefore *ipt* or *ipt nsw* seems to be a name of a place in the palace or a separate palace²⁷ related to the women in the royal household. A *xnr* appears to be a group mainly consisting of women and belonging together for a longer period of time. It was mostly used for groups of singers and musicians and was in use for single groups as well as for the collective.²⁸ A *xnr* could be assigned to a specific temple or god.²⁹ Additionally, the entourage of the Mitanni Princess Gilukhepa married to Amenhotep III was also designated as *xnr*.³⁰ The term *kAp* seems to refer to the living quarters of the king³¹ as well as to a specific group of children who were educated together. There seem to have been different *kAps* in existence at the palace, probably even at the same time.³² The male title *xrd n kAp* therefore results from being part of this group and appears to have had a lifelong significance.³³ Some of the children stayed close together even as adults.³⁴ Therefore, male children seem to have been assigned to the living quarters of

26 DAVIES, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes*, p. 29; MATIĆ, “Children on the Move,” pp. 382–384. For other textual examples of *msw nsw* as prisoners see 374; SÄVE-SÖDERBERG, *Ägypten und Nubien*, p. 185, also cites examples of Nubian children of the rulers coming to Egypt to be held in fortresses.

27 As in Medinet-el-Gurob, SHAW, “Seeking the Ramesside Royal Harem.”

28 Some *xnr* groups could include male members. CALLENDER, “The Nature of the Egyptian ‘Harim’ Dynasties 1–20,” p. 7.

29 CALLENDER, “The Nature of the Egyptian ‘Harim’ Dynasties 1–20,” pp. 7–8 with examples from the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period. At least during that period *xnr* are not exclusively related to Hathor.

30 Ibid., p. 17.

31 FEUCHT, *Das Kind im Alten Ägypten*, p. 268 with examples.

32 “Offensichtlich hat es verschiedene *kApw* gegeben, *kApw* des Palastes, aber vielleicht auch *k3pw* einzelner Königskinder, wo sie mit anderen Kindern zusammen von Erziehern betreut wurden.” FEUCHT, *Das Kind im Alten Ägypten*, pp. 301–302.

33 Ibid., pp. 301–303. A marriage contract is known to be made by members of the *kAp*, and, as Feucht comments, it is not likely that children were the ones issuing it.

34 As seen from quite a lot of the *xrdw n kAp*, who held high titles without actual function but stressing their closeness to the king. Ibid., p. 294. Several people are known from their titles to have belonged to a specific *kAp*; a *xrd n kAp* of Ahmose is known, as well as a *xrd n kAp* of the princess Meretamun, a daughter of Ahmose. Ibid., pp. 301–302. It is not clear whether the name of the *kAp* refers to the children of the named person or to a certain royal child and his or her co-disciples. If there was a *kAp* of a specific princess it seems a possibility that boys and girls were educated together, but maybe only until a certain age. Female education does not seem to be reflected in titulary. The children or young adults had to learn the Egyptian language and script. Quite a few of the *xrdw n kAp* bore also the title of *s5 nsw*. Literacy would have been a prerogative to enter any position in the Egyptian administration.

the king, the kAp, to be educated together with other children of the royal household in groups also named kAp, whereas female children were assigned to a female place within the palace administration called ipt and organised in groups named xnr.

Nubian Women in the Tomb of Amenemhet Huy (TT 40)

Taking a closer look at the Nubian women depicted in the tomb of Amenemhet Huy (Table 1, no. 10a), the scenes show some more unique features. The register in question is part of a greater scene depicting the bringing of southern produce to Egypt (Plate 4). It is situated on the south side of the west wall in the transverse hall of TT 40. The first three registers form a panel where the rulers of the south are shown presenting their produce to Amenemhet Huy and the king. The Nubian women are pictured in the first register (Plates 4, 5). There is no inscription to the scene; instead, handwritten explanations are added to several people and things. The register shows the rulers of Lower Nubia, their children and prisoners before the king. It is intended to be read from right to left. To the right, a great amount of gold, semi-precious stones, minerals, ebony and ivory, shields and furniture is brought before the king. Behind that, three rulers of Lower Nubia are kneeling, and one of them lies prostrate. They are followed by the children of the rulers of all foreign lands, as marked by another inscription between them. After a first group of them, two men are shown carrying gold, hides and giraffe's tails. Together with them, a woman with an elaborate head-dress stands in an oxcart. She is followed by a row of prisoners and two Nubian women with children.³⁵ In contrast to the rulers of Kush in the second register, the rulers of Lower Nubia are depicted directly before the king. The prominent person among them is Heqanefer. His name is added separately to the pictures.

Heqanefer, prince of Miam, bore the title of xrd n kAp. His other titles included sandal maker of the king, chief of the oarsmen³⁶ and bearer of the folding chair of the king.³⁷ His tomb in Toshka is a smaller version of TT 40 and decorated in an elaborate Egyptian

35 It is probable that the msw wrw inscription refers to the woman in the oxcart as well. Whether the prisoners and Nubian women further down the line are also meant is not clear. They might have had a higher rank because they are shown with jewelry and with a feather on the head and the women are also wearing jewelry.

36 In this role as Hry Xn(yt) he appears a second time in TT 40 in front of his men who are praising the newly appointed Amenemhet Huy. East wall, north side: DAVIES & GARDINER, *The Tomb of Huy*, p. 13; pls. 8 & 39.1 (for the inscription), pl. 5 for an overview.

37 SIMPSON, *Heka-Nefer and the Dynastic Material from Toshka and Arminna*, pp. 26–27; the depiction in TT 40 is not the only link to Amenemhet Huy. They also left a shared inscription on the way to the goldmines of the Eastern desert. TÖRÖK, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 271. The depiction in TT 40 shows a second generation of children of the rulers of Miam coming to Egypt. After Heqanefer was a child of the kAp; his children are following in his footsteps. As no heirs are depicted in his tomb, it is likely that the children did not come back to Nubia.

style³⁸ His title of *xrd n kAp* reflects his education in the Egyptian court and is probably responsible for his depiction in direct relationship to the king. Heqanefer and his fellow rulers are shown in a mixed Egyptian-Nubian form. Their skin colour is brown or black, and they wear Egyptian dress with a Nubian sash, hides on their backs, jewelry, and feathers on their heads. The face of the first ruler is carefully executed and depicted with an accented nasolabial fold, the so-called “Kuschitenfalte.” As he is the one executed in the most detailed way and with a lighter skin colour than even the princesses following him, this man is probably Heqanefer himself.

The rulers of Lower Nubia are followed by a single woman and a group of four persons. The inscription of the children of the ruler of all foreign lands is placed between them. Their skin colour is brown and black and they also wear an Egyptian-Nubian mix of dress. The single woman walking in front is depicted with brown skin, wearing a long, pleated and transparent Egyptian dress and sandals. She wears a broad jewelry collar, long earrings and a white bracelet on each of her wrists. In the drawing by Weidenbach (Plate 4), she appears with a hairstyle similar to that of the people following her. She wears a cylindrical crown, the *modius*, on her head. Her appearance is Egyptian except for the bands hanging down from her upper arms. The bands look like strings of pearls. She is not the only one with this iconographic feature in the register and the scene. The four women following her as well as the Nubian women at the end of the row also wear bands like that, as do two men from Upper Nubia in the third register. These bands are generally interpreted as animals’ tails, for some of the parallel depictions clearly show animals’ tails.³⁹ This is not the case with the women pictured here. In fact, the male prisoners at the end of the row wear actual animals’ tail fixed to the back of their loincloths. However, the example most similar to the bands can be found in TT 78, the tomb of the military scribe Haremhab, where a group of Nubian children or young adults with tuft hairstyle are depicted in a scene of music and dance.⁴⁰ Here, most of the dancing youths wear a string similar to the ones depict-

See also the chronology discussed by SIMPSON, *Heka-Nefer and the Dynastic Material from Toshka and Arminna*, pp. 26–27.

³⁸ SIMPSON, *Heka-Nefer and the Dynastic Material from Toshka and Arminna*.

³⁹ For an overview of the other sources: DRENKHahn, *Darstellungen von Negern in Ägypten*, p. 27. The animals’ tails are suspended on the arms or legs or on the back of loincloths. The most interesting example shows a cult statue of Amenemhet II in Nubian costume together with these bands. In the interpretation of TÖRÖK, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 270: “These exotic accessories were magical signs associated with the power of animals and the power over animals and belonged, as it seems, to the ancient symbols of the Nubian chief’s authority [...]. Transformed into ribbons, the animal tails fastened to the Nubian princes elbows would re-appear much later in the iconography of the Meroitic hunter-warrior god Apedemak.” For a discussion of the “Schwänzchen” in the iconography of Kushite women see LOHWASSER, *Die königlichen Frauen im antiken Reich von Kusch*, pp. 212–216.

⁴⁰ BRACK & BRACK, *Das Grab des Haremhab*, pls. 12, 51.

ed in TT 40 on each of their elbows. I therefore suggest a distinction between these bands of pearls and the animals' tails and tentatively assign the bands to the sphere of music and dance.

Princes or Princesses?

In the register described above, the rulers of Lower Nubia are followed by a princess wearing a long dress. Behind her follow four persons sometimes described as princes and sometimes as princesses. They are depicted alternately with brown and black skin colour and appear similar to the princess walking in front of them. They are pictured close together, but their iconography is different. The ones with brown skin wear a tight-fitting top with wide and short sleeves and a pleated skirt around their hips, whereas the two depicted with black skin only wear a short skirt and their upper body is naked. All are wearing sandals. The jewelry of all of them consists of big round earrings with two pendant parts each, a broad golden collar is reaching over the shoulders and they wear three white bracelets on each wrist. In addition, the black-skinned persons wear one or two white bracelets on their upper arms. The previously discussed bands of pearls are hanging down from all of their upper arms. The persons differ in their hairstyles as well. The brown skinned ones are shown with the "Nubian wig," which was especially popular in Amarna times.⁴¹ It looks like a layered cut, with shorter hair on the neck than in front. The ones with black skin are shown with brownish hair and a side lock of a different colour, which turned blue in the course of time. All wear a golden flat cylindrical crown, a so-called *modius*. The inscription between them describes the four as children of the rulers, but are they meant to depict princes or princesses?⁴² At first sight the short dresses indicate men, but other iconographic details are ambiguous or pointing towards an interpretation as women. The "Nubian wig" hairstyle is known from women as well as men and appears very prominent among members of the royal family in Amarna times.⁴³ A parallel to the side lock can be found for example in the tomb of Kheruef (TT 192), who was steward of queen Tiye, the Great Royal Wife of Amenhotep III. Here, the daughters of Amenhotep III are depicted wearing a side lock as well as a longer braid on the side.⁴⁴ In another scene from the same tomb, the *msw wrw* are shown libating.⁴⁵ They too have a short haircut with a longer braid on the side. Although the related examples from the tomb

41 ALDRED, "Hair Styles and History."

42 The publication sees them as princes: DAVIES & GARDINER, *The Tomb of Huy*, p. 24.

43 ALDRED, "Hair Styles and History."

44 EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *The Tomb of Kheruef*, pls. 47, 57.

45 *Ibid.*, pls. 31, 32.

of Kheruef both depict girls, the sidelock of youth can be worn by children and younger adults of both sex and the broad collar and the bracelets can also be worn by both men and women.

The depiction of the modius is especially interesting and leads to an excursus about some other unique imagery showing Nubian women. One example is located on the chair of princess Sitamun, daughter of Amenhotep III. It comes from KV 46, the tomb Sitamun's grandparents Yuya and Tjuyu (Plates 6, 7). The inside of the back of the chair is decorated with two women wearing a long skirt of leather decorated with slits (Plate 6). Both are adorned with elaborate collars and earrings and present necklaces to Sitamun. On the inside of the armrests, four similar figures with elaborately executed differently patterned long skirts and two different headdresses are shown bringing gold rings (Plate 7).⁴⁶ All of them are depicted with a modius on their heads. This feature appears prominently in the time of Amenhotep III, especially with the women of the royal family.⁴⁷ Therefore it is probable that this is another depiction of the *msw wrw*. The scene is the only scene in which women are bringing the tribute. A similar changing of imagery appears, again in the tomb of Kheruef (TT 192). Here, two women are shown bound together under the chair of Queen Tiye (Plate 8).⁴⁸ The left woman is shown as Nubian with a long skirt, hanging breasts and a short haircut. Above them, on the armrest of the chair, Queen Tiye, in the form of a sphinx, is shown trampling on the female enemies.⁴⁹ Both of these scenes see Tiye assuming the role of ruler over the female world. These scenes change a typical imagery of the king into a female form.⁵⁰ Such a change could also be the case of the chair of Sitamun, as purpose and period are comparable.

Returning to the topic of princes or princesses in the scene from TT 40, the modius appears as a clearly female iconographic feature. A closer look at the people reveals that the first person in the row is depicted with what seems to be a rounded bosom (Plate 5). This makes it likely the princess is followed by a group of other princesses. Why they wear short skirts instead of the customary long dresses is not clear. From their position behind the princess, who is walking in front, and their not very individualised depiction, it is possible that a princess is shown here with the high-ranking women of her *xnr-entourage*.

46 QUIBELL, *Tomb of Yuaa and Thuiu*, pp. 53–54, pls. XXXVIII–XLIII.

47 In general BRYAN, "A Newly Discovered Statue of a Queen from the Reign of Amenhotep III," p. 35, ann. 28 for the few non-royal examples; the chair of Sitamun is mentioned on p. 36, ann. 33.

48 EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *The Tomb of Kheruef*, pls. 48, 49, 52a. BAYER, *Teje*, Dok 55.6; pp. 266–270; pl. 63.

49 Ibid., Dok. 55.6.1; pp. 270–272; pl. 21a.

50 ROTH, *Gebieten aller Länder*, pp. 11–49.

Looking at the corresponding scene from Rekhmire (Plate 2; Table 1, no. 4a), there is a similar group, which might also fit into the pattern of a princess and her entourage. Here, the princes walk in front of the women with children and are followed by the women without children. At the end of the group there follows a person, presumably a girl, walking alone. Behind her, a group of four persons with short skirts, jewelry and the same “Nubian Wig” hairstyle⁵¹ follows. The princes who are missing from the Huy depiction can be seen here walking at the front of the row. At the same position in Huy, the rulers of Lower Nubia are depicted. The men led by Heqanefer are described as *rrw*. The term itself might designate some kind of contractual relationship with Egypt.⁵² From this inscription but also from the chronology it becomes clear that they do not assign themselves to the Egyptian court, but are rather responsible for the valuable delivery of their daughters.⁵³ If this assumption is correct, Heqanefer is shown giving his daughter(s) away as he himself was given away to Egypt to become a *xrd n kAp*, a child of the Egyptian royal education system.

The Princess in the Chariot

Another often depicted scene from the tomb of Amenemhet Huy shows a woman standing in an oxcart (Plates 4, 5). The whole scene consists of Nubians bringing gold and gold dust. In front of them a chariot drawn by two oxen is depicted. A woman with a unique headdress of feathers stands in the cart, which is steered by another person. In front of the cart stands a small person facing backwards and tending two oxen. The woman in the cart is depicted with brown skin colour. She wears an Egyptian dress and a broad jewelry collar. She has long golden earrings and about six golden and white bracelets on each of her wrists. Her short round haircut is executed in yellow but black strands are painted on the front and on the back of her head. On her head she wears a modius in which a big headdress is inserted. From its pattern it is likely made from ostrich feathers mounted on a basis of gold and fastened by four gold supports.⁵⁴ She

51 Here they are regarded as women: “There follow five more women, distinguished by ample necklaces, but scanty loincloths.” DAVIES, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes*, p. 30.

52 TÖRÖK, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 264.

53 For the chronology of Heqanefer see SIMPSON, *Heka-Nefer and the Dynastic Material from Toshka and Arminna*, p. 27.

54 A comparison between the photograph and the drawing by Weidenbach shows that Weidenbach recognized the unique design of the headdress, but seemingly put it together with the more usual depiction of a fan and added a stick to the drawing, on which the headdress seems to be mounted. See Plates 4 and 5.

is standing in an Egyptian chariot, which is depicted in great detail and probably specially adapted to fit the oxen.⁵⁵

From the context of the scene it is probable that the woman in the chariot is yet another Nubian princess coming to the Egyptian court. The unusual depiction with an oxcart has led to the assumption that the Egyptians used the tomb painting to make fun of the Nubians by way of depicting one of their princesses in an oxcart.⁵⁶ Yet, besides the unique combination of a princess and a chariot drawn by oxen there is no further reason for such an argument. An ostrakon of a four-wheeled wagon was found in the forecourt of TT 40⁵⁷ and might or might not be related to the depiction. The interesting question posed here is in fact the means by which women, especially high-ranking women, moved around in the country.⁵⁸ A possible explanation for the usage of a chariot drawn by oxen is that the princess depicted here came from a region further away from the Nile and therefore had to be transported a longer way overland. For that reason, a chariot was better fitted than a carrying chair. As the Nubians arguably had more cattle than horses, such transport would have been facilitated by harnessing the oxen. Cattle was also valuable, as their depiction alongside other southern produce such as gold and ivory and their careful adornment with enemies' heads or even a kind of a garden shows. In another scene from TT 40 showing the river transport of the Nubian goods, two different kinds of cattle are shown on specially equipped transport ships.

After the oxcart and the ostrakon of a four-wheeled wagon there are two more iconographic features regarding transport to be discussed. The first is the unique depiction of a miniature chariot held up by a Nubian and located together with the furniture between the first and the second register behind the head of Huy. Secondly, the idea that a golden cabinet behind Huy at the height of the second register might show a portable chair was proposed by Davies,⁵⁹ but seems rather unlikely, not only because of its closeness to the very similarly depicted "set-pieces" nearby, but also because the few examples of carrying chairs known from the New Kingdom are all open models, unlike this depiction.⁶⁰

Behind the woman in the oxcart there follow five prisoners bound by their hands and with a restriction in the form of a rope hanging from their necks. Their skin colour is brown or black. The

55 For the technical details see BURMEISTER, "Die Sicherung der ethnischen Ordnung," pp. 134–137.

56 Ibid.

57 DAVIES & GARDINER, *The Tomb of Huy*, p. 34 with fig. 4.

58 High-ranking women in Egypt are known to be transported in carrying chairs. The royal women of Amarna are shown in chariots. Typical travel would have consisted of a boat trip. KÖPP, "Weibliche Mobilität im Alten Ägypten," pp. 134–135.

59 DAVIES & GARDINER, *The Tomb of Huy*, p. 22.

60 KÖPP, "Weibliche Mobilität im Alten Ägypten," p. 36.

first man in the line is wearing an Egyptian skirt, and the men following him are clad in loincloths made of cowhide and leather with broad codpieces hanging in front. Animals' tails are fastened to the backside of their loincloths. They wear big round earrings. At least three of them wear a band around their head which is shown bound with a bow on the back. This might have been a means to fasten the feather each of them wears on the head. They are followed by two women, who are depicted in the standard way of Nubian women. One of them has black skin, the other one brown skin. They wear big round earrings,⁶¹ and the previously mentioned bands of pearls are hanging from their upper arms. The woman in front wears a long skirt consisting of bands of different colour. These bands are separated by points signifying seams. The skirt is most probably made of leather.⁶² Two black bands are hanging in front and look like parts of a girdle. Each of the women has a child on her hand. Another child is carried on the back in a basket. The women are depicted with pendulous breasts and a broad stature.

The Faras Scene

Another very interesting scene can be found elsewhere in TT 40 (Plate 9). On the south side of the east wall of his tomb, Amenemhet Huy is pictured presiding over collection of the revenue of Lower Nubia in Faras.⁶³ In five registers, the subjects of Lower Nubia are shown bringing their revenue to be weighed and registered. Gold in the form of rings on tablets is brought in front. Further behind, people bring single bags of gold dust. In the fifth register, some men bring a quiver and a bow case. Gold in the form of rings and gold dust in bags is shown already registered, as well as cowhides and leopard hides, red and green minerals. The men are shown walking in front, the women in the back. All wear Egyptian clothing,

⁶¹ A necklace, as suggested by the Weidenbach drawing, cannot be identified in the pictures.

⁶² "Type A" in the classification by DRENKHahn, *Darstellungen von Negern in Ägypten*, pp. 74–76 with a comment regarding archeological finds from Nubia. For a recent archaeological find of such a skirt see "HK27C," online, with further links. This particular skirt is held up by means of a drawstring.

⁶³ DAVIES & GARDINER, *The Tomb of Huy*, pls. 16, 17; p. 19. It is not stated explicitly that this scene is meant to be located in Faras. This is probable because of its setting in the pictorial narrative between Huy's arrival in Faras and his inspection of the transport boats. The produce is different from the scene taking place in Thebes. There is more gold dust than gold rings, leopard and cow hides, and chests; much less of the red and green minerals; and one of the men is shown bringing a quiver and bow case whereas the furniture, set pieces and shields are missing. If and how the produce collected here is related to the produce shown on the south side of the west wall is not clear. It might be a part of the produce depicted as being presented before Amenemhet and the king but it is also possible that the produce seen collected here is completely unrelated to the other one and going to a different administrative unit.

maybe marking them as Egyptian subjects.⁶⁴ Apart from their clothing, they are shown as a very diverse mix of Egyptians and Nubians. The men have a red or brown skin colour, some are bearded, some bald with only some white hair around the head, in different sizes. No one wears any kind of jewelry. The skin colour of the women is painted in different shades of red and brown. The depiction of pendulous breasts can only be seen on the first woman in the first register. A hanging breast is indicated under her transparent dress. Two old women with white hair in the second and third register are remarkable. One of them walks supported by a stick. In the same third row, a single child, probably a girl because of the hint of a bosom and the accentuated eye make-up, is depicted. She is walking alone and turning with raised hands towards the women behind her. It is not clear whether she is to be seen as part of the revenue or just accompanying the adults in this scene.

This whole scene is remarkably different from the “normal” scenes of bringing the Nubian produce. It is set in Nubia and the intention of the picture seems to show all the different people of Faras and its surroundings, men and women, young and old, little and tall, Egyptian and Nubian. In this respect it is unique pictorial evidence of the “Egyptianisation of Nubia.” On the other hand, it shows that the ordinary citizens of Faras probably had access to gold, although markedly not for personal use, such as jewelry on the Nubians shown in the scenes set in Thebes. Together with the depiction on the chair of Sitamun these are the only depictions of women bringing “tribute,” although in a completely different context.

Summary

Looking closely at the depictions of Nubian women in New Kingdom Egypt, several points become visible: Nubian women in Egyptian art are characterized by a distinct iconography. Their depiction appears standardized in the main iconographic features, with contrasting details. Both women and children show a different iconography from other foreigners. During the New Kingdom, the women become visible in temple and tomb scenes. In the temple scenes, their pictures form a contrasting image to the images of war, which is seen coming to the villages. These scenes appear rather standardized and do not offer much iconographic detail. The tomb scenes show the Nubian women together with their children in the moment they come to Egypt as part of the southern “tribute.” Many of the scenes show the women forced or even bound. As for the Nubian children, their de-

64 If this assumption is correct, Heqanefer and his fellow wrw were not considered as Egyptian subjects. Once again we have to think about the significance of the word wrw as a special contractual relationship between Egypt and a foreign ruler, in contrast to a hqA.

gree of nakedness versus clothedness, different hairstyles, jewelry and their positioning with the women show different status and age groups.

A singular depiction presents itself in two scenes from the tomb of Amenemhet Huy (TT 40). One scene shows Nubian princesses coming to the Egyptian court. This is one of only two scenes where Nubian princesses are explicitly depicted. The other comes from TT 100. The two scenes paint for the princesses a rather different future in Egypt. In the tomb of Rekhmire, the children of the rulers are assigned as workers to the temple of Amun, a fate which is depicted elsewhere in the tomb where foreign women present their produce and children in front of the temple personnel. In TT 40, the Nubian princesses come to the Egyptian court. They are assigned to the *ipt*, the royal household and become part of a group designated as *xnr*, a word which could also be used for the entourage of a royal person. Male children or young adults are in turn assigned to a *kAp* group within the royal household. In the tomb paintings of TT 40, a princess is followed by her *xnr* entourage. In this scene, the cylindrical modius crown marks the persons as female. The bands they wear on their elbows are different from animals' tails. They resemble pearl-strings and are probably related to the sphere of music and dance. A princess in a chariot may have come from a region further away from the Nile. In another scene located in Faras, the mixed Egyptian-Nubian inhabitants of the region are shown in a unique way.

This closer look at a clearly defined set of interconnected pictorial evidence showing Nubian women allows us to look beyond the limitations of Egyptian stereotypes and propaganda. We see the Egyptians truthfully depicting the specific characteristics of Nubian women. The pictures show their special ways of dressing, as well as aspects of internal age and social groups, manifesting itself for example in hairstyles and jewellery.

The depictions are important historical sources in two respects: on the one hand, they allow a glimpse into some aspects of Nubian society which are known neither from the archaeological remains of Nubian societies nor from Egyptian textual sources. On the other hand, they show an often-neglected aspect of Ancient Egypt: apart from their focus on religion and the afterlife, the ancient Egyptians were also exact bookkeepers and accurate observers and chroniclers. The Nubian women were depicted respectfully with their cultural characteristics, even as prisoners.

The identification, description and comparison of Nubian women in the Egyptian art of the New Kingdom is therefore one step to uncovering Nubians and Nubian culture in Egypt, the logical by-product of thousands of years of cultural contact. A closer look fur-

ther reveals the diversity in ancient Egyptian art and society and its multicultural character.

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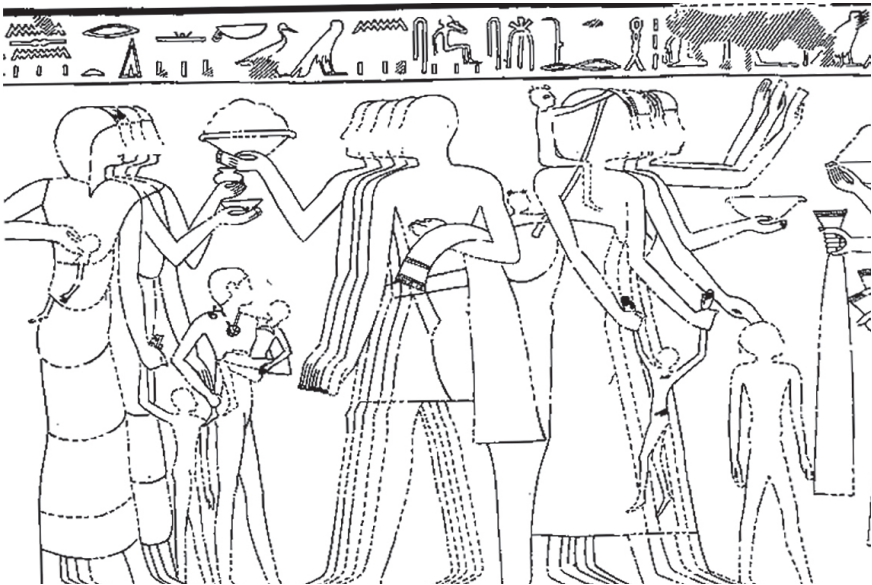
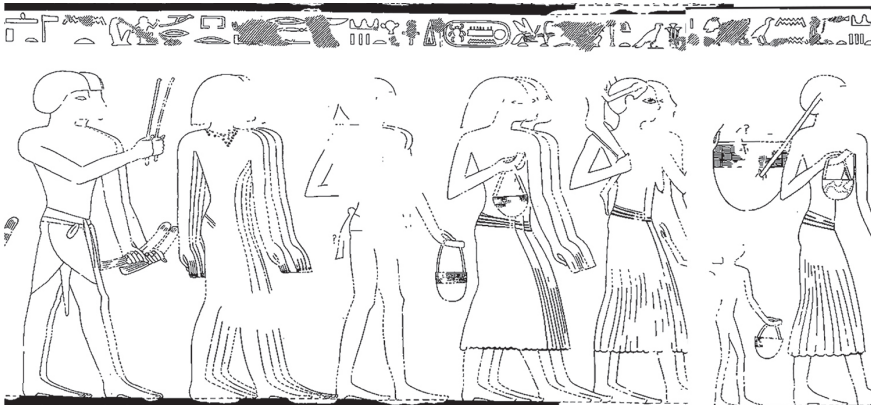
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Plate 1 *Mirror with Handle in Form of Girl*, ca. 1400–1292 B.C.E. Bronze, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{13}{16}$ in. (22.2 x 12.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 60.27.1. Creative Commons-BY.



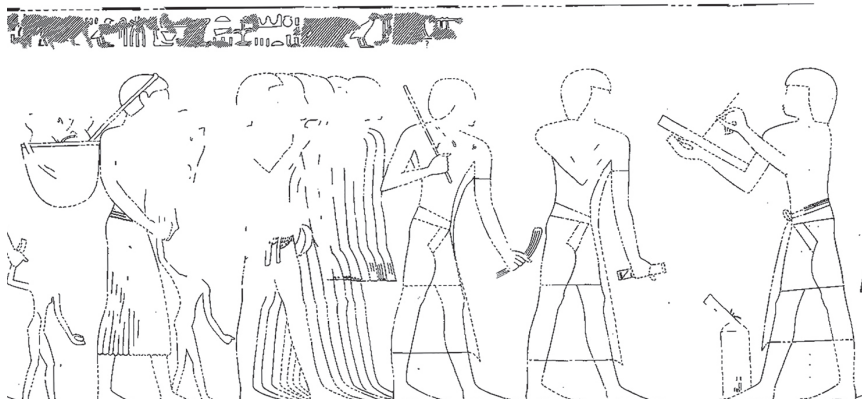


Plate 2 Children of the rulers as tribute, 18th Dynasty from the Tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100, from DAVIES, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes, II*, compiled from pls. 21 and 22, © The Metropolitan Museum of Arts.

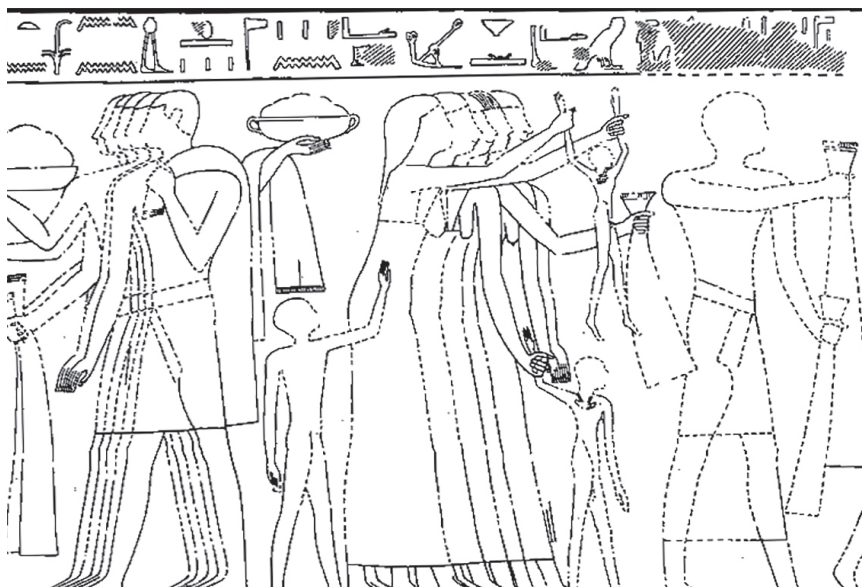


Plate 3 Inspection of the mrw-workers, 18th Dynasty from the Tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100, from DAVIES, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes, II*, plate 57, detail, © The Metropolitan Museum of Arts.





Plate 4 Tribute Scene, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, from the Tomb of Huy TT 40, Digitalisat der Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Halle: <http://edoc3.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/lepsius/tafelwa3.html>.





Plate 5 Tomb of Huy (TT 40), Transverse Hall West Wall South side, upper registers, picture compiled from three photographs. flickr/kairoInfo4u. Creative Commons-BY-NC-SA-2.0.



Plate 6 *Chair of
Satamun, from
QUIBELL, plate 38.*





Plate 7 Detail of chair: Inside, chair of Satamun, from QUIBELL, *Tomb of Yuua and Thuiu*, plate 43.

Plate 8 *Detail of the Throne of Queen Tiye, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, from EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, TT 192 Kheruef, pl. 52A, photograph courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*





Plate 9 TT 40, the tomb of Amenhotep Huy; Pano 2 (detail). flickr/kairoInfo4u. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA-2.0.

No.	Location	Date
1	Mortuary temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el Bahari	Hatshepsut
2	Temple of Armant, Pylon	Thutmose III
3	TT 81 Ineni	Amenhotep I / Thutmose III
4a	TT 100 Rekhmire	Thutmose III-Amenhotep II
4b	TT 100 Rekhmire	Thutmose III-Amenhotep II
5	TT 89 Amenmose	Thutmose III-Amenhotep III
6	TT 78 Haremhab	Amenhotep II-Amenhotep III
7	TT 63 Sobekhotep	Thutmose IV
8	Amarna 2 Merire II	Amarna
9	Amarna 1 Huy	Amarna

Context	Literature
Fragment of pastoral scene, woman and child before hut	NAVILLE, <i>The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir El-Bahari Part II</i> , pl. 71; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 47, pp. 208–217
Booty (kfa), women, and children	MOND & MYERS, <i>Temples of Armant</i> , pl. 9; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 48, pp. 217–219.
Booty (sqr-anxw), women, and children	DZIOBEK, <i>Das Grab des Ineni</i> ; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 34, pp. 144–150.
Children of the rulers (msw wrw) as booty and workers for the temple of Amun (mrw), women, and women with children	DAVIES, <i>The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes</i> , 29–30; <i>ibid.</i> , pl. 21–22; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 5, pp. 41–42.
Inspection of the mrw workers, women, and some children	DAVIES, <i>The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes</i> , pp. 47–48; Davies, <i>The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes II</i> , pl. 57; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 40, pp. 185–186.
Tribute scene, women, and children	DAVIES & DAVIES, “The Tomb of Amenmose (No. 89) at Thebes”; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 8 & 23, pp. 54–55.
Tribute scene of the wr Xsj n KAS Xsj, women and children	BRACK & BRACK, <i>Das Grab des Haremheb</i> ; HALLMAN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 13, p. 72.
Two rows of Nubian tribute, women and children, man with a child	WRESZINSKI, <i>Atlas I</i> , 56c; DZIOBEK & ABDEL RAZIQ, <i>Das Grab des Sobekhotep</i> , pl. 2a; p. 33; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 14, p. 75.
Tribute scene, women bound on the neck and led along	DAVIES, <i>The Rock Tombs of El Amarna Part II</i> , pp. 39–40; pls. 37 & 38; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 20, p. 99.
Tribute (jnw and bAkW), women, and children	DAVIES, <i>The Rock Tombs of El Amarna Part III</i> , p. 11, pl. 15; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 19, p. 94.

Table 1:
Compiled from
DRENKHahn,
Darstellungen,
p. 165; Liste V
and HALLMANN,
Tributszenen (with
modifications and
additions by the
author).

* I had no access
to a depiction of
this scene

10a	TT 40 Amenhotep Huy	Tutanchamun
10b	TT 40 Amenhotep Huy	Tutanchamun
11*	Gebel Silsileh	Haremhab
12a	Temple of Beit el Wali	Ramses II
12b	Temple of Beit el Wali	Ramses II
13	Temple of Derr	Ramses II
14	Medinet Habu	Ramses III

Tribute scene, children of the ruler (msw wrw), princess, women, and children as prisoners	DAVIES & GARDINER, <i>The Tomb of Huy</i> , pp. 22–25; pl. 23–30; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 21, pp. 103–104.
Inhabitants of Faras bring tribute to be recorded, women, one child, old women	DAVIES & GARDINER, <i>The Tomb of Huy</i> , p. 19, pls. 16, 17; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 46, pp. 207–208.
Pastoral or village scene in war relief	DRENKHAHN, <i>Darstellungen von Negern in Ägypten</i> , Liste V
War, wounded come back to the village, women, and children, two scenes	ROEDER, <i>Der Felsentempel von Bet el-Wali</i> , pp. 30–31, pl. 28, 29.
Women and children as part of the booty	ROEDER, <i>Der Felsentempel von Bet el-Wali</i> , pp. 41–42; pls. 33 & 34; HALLMANN, <i>Die Tributszenen des Neuen Reiches</i> , Dok. 53, p. 231.
War, women, and children in the village	BLACKMAN, <i>The Temple of Derr</i> , p. 20; pls. 16–18
War, woman, and child in the village	Epigraphic SURVEY, <i>Medinet Habu I</i> , pl. 9.

Dancing for Hathor: Nubian Women in Egyptian Cultic Life

Solange Ashby

In the non-literate and nomadic C-Group culture of Lower Nubia, ritual and worship were not organized around a sacred text, nor were they carried out in a temple.¹ Rather, many important rites of passage and worship were heavily associated with communal performance of dance and music. In such rituals the power of music and movement were harnessed to transport the worshipper into an ecstatic encounter with the Divine. Worshipers, engaged in nocturnal rituals for the goddess Hathor, sought this type of ecstatic encounter. It appears that the ecstatic nature of the dancing performed for the goddess and the spiritual “drunkenness” that it induced were valued in the ritual context of celebrations for Hathor: goddess of music, dance, love, and fertility. Women were the essential performers of the nocturnal dances in the rites. While Egyptian women comprised the majority of the priestesses of Hathor, Nubian women are attested over several millennia as dancers in the celebration of the cult. Earlier Egyptologists reveal a racism that disparaged the type of dance performed by the Nubian women as “wild” and described the women as wearing “barbarous” clothing. Brunner-Traut suggested that, “only as an exception, though, do Negro girls dance in a way that assimilates Egyptian sophistication.”²

Nubian women appear as Hathoric dancers from the Middle Kingdom (2000–1700 BCE) through the Roman period (30 BCE–395 CE). Representations of priestesses of Hathor sporadically, but re-

1 YELLIN, “Nubian Religion,” p. 125. The C-Group is attested archaeologically as an indigenous population of Lower Nubia from the Egyptian Old Kingdom (ca. 2685 BCE) through the Egyptian occupation of Lower Nubia (1550 BCE). While the C-Group people did not disappear from Lower Nubia, their archaeological artifacts became highly Egyptianized: NÄSER, “The C-Group in Lower Nubia,” p. 351.

2 BRUNNER-TRAUT, *Der Tanz im alten Ägypten*, p. 223. See fn. 62 for the full quote.

peatedly, included Nubian³ women dancers, singers, and musicians engaged in religious celebrations of the Beautiful One, the Gold, the Lady of Dance, the goddess Hathor. Tattooed priestesses of Hathor, preserved as mummies from the Eleventh Dynasty (Middle Kingdom), bore designs otherwise found only on contemporaneous C-Group women of Lower Nubia. Beginning in the New Kingdom (1550–1070 BCE), Nubian women appear in Egyptian tomb and temple art that depicts banquet scenes where those women act as musicians and dancers. In the Ptolemaic period (323–30 BCE) temple at Medamud, the hieroglyphic text of a hymn to Hathor describes the dancing Nubians who accompanied the goddess on her return from Nubia in her manifestation as Tefnut, the Eye of Re. Performing sacred dances for Hathor, Nubian dancers, musicians, and acrobats were a recurring theme in representations of Hathoric rites, jubilees, and banquet scenes for millennia.

Lower Nubian Religion

In the non-literate societies of Nubia, religious practices would have been performed communally and preserved orally.⁴ In contrast to the Egyptian tradition of temples decorated with hieroglyphic texts and scenes of the gods, Nubian religious rites of the C-Group (contemporary with Middle Kingdom Egypt) centered on communal celebrations performed in sacred places, often located on hilltops or in caves. Processions⁵ associated with pilgrimage to sacred sites involved large groups of lay worshippers⁶ who engaged in feasting⁷ and ritual consumption of sorghum beer,⁸ which was likely accompanied by song and dance performed for the gods. Although this practice bears superficial resemblance to the Egyptian incorporation of music and dance into their religious worship, these elements seem to have been central to the religious practices of C-Group peo-

3 I assume these women were of Nubian background based on their depiction with dark brown skin in contrast to the standard Egyptian depiction of women with light brown/yellow skin. There is no need to assume these Nubian women were not resident in Egypt. With a long history of immigration in both directions, both Nubia and Egypt were very heterogeneous societies.

4 I refer to Nubian popular religion as opposed to the elite religion of Nubia during the Napatan and Meroitic periods, which were highly Egyptianized.

5 YELLIN, "Nubian Religion," pp. 136, 141.

6 The addition of porches to temples in the Late Period was closely linked to changes in the composition of processions during the Kushite (Nubian) 25th Dynasty, when laymen joined the priests in procession. See ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, pp. 282–84.

7 SMITH, "Pharaohs, Feasts, and Foreigners," pp. 49, 55–56. Feasting is mentioned in Nubian prayer inscriptions at Philae and Dakka. See, GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenos*, vol. 1, pp. 26–31 (Dak. 30) and pp. 114–119 (Ph. 416). Mentioned twice in each graffito, the celebratory feasting occurred in conjunction with processions and festivals. See also ASHBY, *Calling Out to Isis*, pp. 19, 168, 232.

8 EDWARDS, "Sorghum, Beer and Kushite Society," pp. 74–76. For evidence of the continuing cultural importance of sorghum beer, see REKDAL, "Money, Milk and Sorghum Beer," pp. 368–373, esp. p. 370.

ple who did not have a temple-based religion or sacred written texts, and perhaps did not have a hierarchical priesthood such as those associated with Egyptian temples. The two distinct systems of worship were reflective of the difference between the pastoral lifestyle typical of the C-Group populations and the settled, agricultural society maintained by the Egyptians.

The ancient Nubians worshiped their gods on hilltops and in caves as well as at the graves of their dead. Until the Egyptian conquest of Nubia in the New Kingdom, the ancient Nubians were non-literate. With the exception of the Kerma culture, they did not construct permanent religious structures until after the Egyptians began building temples in Nubia.⁹

In this paper I will suggest that traditional forms of ritual music and dance, a central element in the religious practice of Nubians, were incorporated into Egyptian rites performed for the goddess Hathor whose origin in Nubia and journey to Egypt would have been celebrated appropriately with Nubian music and dance. A type of dance called the *ksks*-dance, attributed to Nubians, was incorporated into Egyptian rites performed for the goddess Hathor during the Middle Kingdom when Egypt colonized Nubia and came into intense contact with the C-Group people living there. The first textual attestation of the *ksks*-dance appears in the Middle Kingdom¹⁰ (c. 2000 BCE) in reference to a cultic dance performed for Hathor and was the name of a dance, performed by black people, described in scholarly literature as “Negertanz.”¹¹ Depictions of dark-skinned women (relative to Egyptian women who are traditionally painted a light brownish-yellow color) continue to appear in Egyptian art during the Ramesside period (c. 1200–1000 BCE), while hieroglyphic textual references from a Ptolemaic temple (c. 150 BCE) at Medamud and Roman-period prayer inscriptions found in temples of Lower Nubia (first century CE) continue to describe the journey to Egypt of Nubian worshippers of Hathor. Meroitic funerary chapel scenes from

9 YELLIN, “Nubian Religion,” pp. 125, 131. The religious structures found at Kerma (2500–1450 BCE) are distinctly different from Egyptian temples. Built to resemble “high places,” the *deffufa* are solid mud brick structures that provide a high place for worship on a flat area at the top. The Eastern Defuffa at Kerma was originally surmounted by a monolithic stela, which was five meters high. At nearby Doukki Gel, Charles Bonnet has also discovered a series of circular structures that predate the temples of Thutmose I of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the earliest Egyptian king to conquer Kerma. See BONNET, “Un ensemble religieux nubien devant une forteresse égyptienne du début de la XVIII^e dynastie,” pp. 98–106.

10 BRUNNER-TRAUT, *Der Tanz im alten Ägypten*, pp. 79–80.

11 Brunner-Traut’s use of the offensive German term *Neger* to refer to the dark-skinned dancers who she deems “foreign” is perfectly in keeping with her racist portrayal of the people and their dance as “wild,” “inflamed,” and “uncontrolled,” which Brunner-Traut contrasts to the elegance of the Egyptian style of dance. For a particularly offensive quote, see *ibid.*, p. 81 “Zusammenfassung”.

the first century CE may depict the same dance, emphasizing the southern origins of this type of dance. European travellers in 19th century Egypt and Sudan commented on the unique dances that they witnessed being performed for important community events. It is asserted here that a continuous method of worshipping the divine is manifested in the Hathoric dances, music, and religious iconography associated with Nubian women worshippers from the Middle Kingdom to the Roman period.

Mythological Description of Hathor's Return from Nubia

In the Tale of the Sun's Eye,¹² an enraged Tefnut, in the form of a bloodthirsty lion goddess, stalked the Earth devouring humanity, which had rebelled against her father Re while he reigned as king in Egypt.¹³ The Egyptian gods Shu and Thoth travelled to Bougem, in southeastern Nubia,¹⁴ where they transformed into monkeys to safely approach the lion goddess. The two gods danced, plied the goddess with copious amounts of wine, and spoke magical spells to pacify and beguile Tefnut so that she might be calmed and enticed to travel to Egypt. Soothed by the dance of Shu and the magical words of Thoth and thoroughly intoxicated on the wine they offered to her, Tefnut was convinced to make the journey from Nubia to Egypt. At the border between the two lands, the flames of the goddess' wrath were cooled in the waters at the source of the Nile that emerge in the vicinity of the island of Philae at the First Cataract, site of a Ptolemaic-period temple. At this initial point of entry into Egypt, Tefnut was transformed by the cool waters and became Hathor, the goddess of music, dance, love, and drunkenness. Her arrival and transformation at the temple complex on Philae would have been celebrated with singing, dancing, and rejoicing to mark the return of the "Distant Goddess" from her sojourn in Nubia.¹⁵

Nubian Priestesses of Hathor

The central social, financial, and cultural importance of cattle to C-Group Nubians, who were East African cattle pastoralists, would have made the imagery of Hathor, portrayed as a cow or a woman with cow ears, appealing.¹⁶ From the kings of Kerma, buried under tumuli surrounded by thousands of cow skulls, to the Napatan kings who offered long-horn cattle and hundreds of milk jugs to

12 SPIEGELBERG, *Ägyptische mythus von Sonnenaue*, pp. 1–8; SPIEGELBERG, "Sonnenaue, Demotischer Mythos vom."

13 DAUMAS, "Hathor," p. 1026.

14 INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la déesse lointaine à Philae*, pp. 201–203.

15 DAUMAS, "Hathor," p. 1026.

16 HAFSAAS, *Cattle Pastoralists in a Multicultural Setting*, pp. 12–23.

the temples at Napata (4th Cataract), cattle and milk had long been prominent in Nubian religious and funerary rituals. For C-Group worshippers, the goddess Hathor may have been assimilated to their own cow goddess. In this way, C-Group people, living in a culturally heterogeneous Nile Valley, came to be participants in the Egyptian cult of Hathor.

C-Group women participated in the worship of Hathor by engaging in traditional Nubian dances, which were viewed by the Egyptians as exotic and erotic. A close examination of Egyptian depictions of Nubian women dancing reveals the characteristics of the women's dance and provides the Egyptian name for their style of dance. The *ksks*-dance was acrobatic, involving leaps and flips. The women performed wearing leather skirts, cowrie shell girdles, and bore tattoos on their breasts, abdomens, and thighs. Each of these attributes is well attested in the C-Group funerary assemblages.

Women¹⁷ who bore the titles royal wife, priestess of Hathor, and "Sole Royal Ornament" were buried in six individual, underground tombs surmounted by private chapels on the platform of the funerary complex of the Eleventh Dynasty king, Nebhetepre Mentuhotep II (c. 2000 BCE).¹⁸ Their richly decorated sarcophagi and shrines indicate the elevated positions of these royal wives and Priestesses of Hathor. Additionally, three mummified women who bore multiple tattoos were discovered in the adjacent triangular courtyard north of Mentuhotep II's funerary complex.¹⁹ One woman's name was preserved – Amunet – along with her titles "Priestess of Hathor" and "King's favorite ornament."²⁰ Her left shoulder and breast bore a row of dots encased in two lines; on her right forearm nine rows of dotted marks form another tattoo.²¹ The abdominal region contained two separate tattoos: just above the navel and below the chest were two rectangular shapes composed of vertical patterns of dots and dashes, while a series of horizontal lines covers her lower abdomen and suprapubic area. Multiple diamond (lozenge) shapes made of

17 Not all scholars agree that the three tattooed mummies found at Deir el-Bahari were Nubian women, as I suggest below.

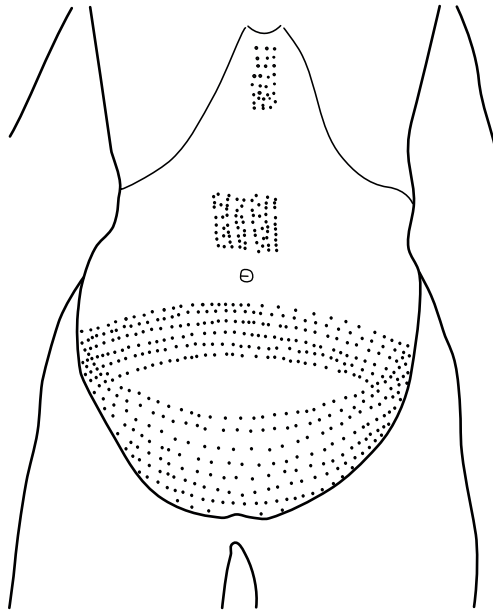
18 NAVILLE, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el Bahari*, vol. 2, pp. 6–9; WINLOCK, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahari 1911–1931*, pp. 36–46; MORRIS, "Paddle Dolls and Performance," pp. 77–79; GILLAM, "Priestesses of Hathor," p. 231.

19 WINLOCK, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahari 1911–1931*, pp. 36–40, fig. 3 (plan of "The Nebhetepetre Temple"). Knowledge of the precise location of Amunet's burial has been lost, but scholars believe that it may have been in tomb 4 or 5, on the north side of the king's complex or, perhaps more likely in the triangular north courtyard: MORRIS, "Paddle Dolls," p. 79; = ROEHRIG, "Two Tattooed Women from Thebes," p. 531.

20 Amunet's second title *hkr.t nls.w.t w't.t* "King's Favorite Ornament" has also been translated as "Sole Lady in Waiting." See GRAVES-BROWN, *Dancing for Hathor*, p. 115.

21 Amunet's left arm may have been tattooed as well. It is not visible because the mummy rests on the left side: TASSIE, "Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia," p. 90.

Figure 1.
Amunet's tattoos
(re-drawn by Lisa
Kennard, after
Bianchi 1988, fig.
2; from Keimer
1948, fig. 9).



dots form a tattoo on her right thigh.²² Evidence of additional scarification is found in the groin area.²³

The other two female mummies, discovered in 1923,²⁴ bear tattoos similar to those found on Amunet. Together, the three women found at Deir el-Bahari are the earliest examples of the practice of tattooing in Egypt.²⁵ However, the practice of tattooing is attested over many thousands of years in visual arts and on mummified bodies in Nubia.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the C-Group people, whom the Egyptians colonized beginning in the early Middle Kingdom, introduced the practice of tattooing women into Egypt.²⁶ A total of forty-three mummified bodies with tattoos have been recovered – almost exclusively female and Nubian.²⁷

22 These same “diamond” or “lozenge” shapes decorate C-Group pottery and figurines buried with the dead. See HAFSAAS, *Cattle Pastoralists*, pp. 80, 170. The “lozenge” pattern of the beadwork embroidered onto leather girdles and skirts or linen was characteristic of the C-Group. See MORRIS, “Paddle Dolls and Performance,” p. 80; HAFSAAS, *Cattle Pastoralists*, p. 95; BIANCHI, “Tattoo in Ancient Egypt,” p. 22.

23 TASSIE, “Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia” p. 90. For a depiction of the tattoos see *ibid.*, fig. 2.

24 WINLOCK, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahari 1911–1931*, p. 74; KEIMER, *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l’Egypte ancienne*, pp. 13–15.

25 BIANCHI, “Tattoo in Ancient Egypt,” p. 22; TASSIE, “Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia” p. 92.

26 BIANCHI, “Tattoo in Ancient Egypt,” 24. “Available evidence, therefore, suggests that Egyptian tattoo was imported from Nubia and developed during the course of the Middle Kingdom.”

27 TASSIE, “Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia” p. 89.

[T]he fact that more mummified remains with tattoos dating to early periods come from the most northerly part of Lower Nubia, an area known as and settled by the Wawat tribe, it may be that they developed the practice of tattooing to culturally identify themselves from the Egyptian civilization to the north and the growing Kerma (Kushite) civilization to the south in Upper Nubia.²⁸

The lozenge-shaped pattern found on the tattooed women from Deir el-Bahari also decorates figurines with truncated legs found in both funerary and settlement contexts. Formerly called “concubines of the dead” they are now referred to as fertility figurines.²⁹ Fertility figurines share many stylistic features with paddle dolls interred as funerary equipment: cross-bands worn over the chest, cowrie shell girdles, accentuated pubic triangle, and ornately dressed hair.³⁰ Morris posits that the paddle dolls represented Hathoric dancers, buried with the deceased in order to perform the proper rites in the funerary context.³¹ These two types of figurines are heavily represented at Deir el-Bahari, an area associated with Hathor as the goddess of the West.³² Fertility figurines are often associated with burials in Nubia.³³

Winlock confirms Derry’s earlier description of these women as Nubian: “Derry had already noticed that the features of the tattooed dancing girls buried in the Neb-hepet-Re temple showed marked Nubian traits and that Nubian blood had probably flowed through the veins even of such ladies of the king’s *harim* as ‘Ashayet and

28 Ibid., p. 93.

29 Morris, “Paddle Dolls and Performance,” pp. 71–72.

30 Ibid., pp. 89, 92, 93, n. 105, 94. The cross-bands, cowrie shell girdles, and hair dressed in locks are attested as the traditional attire of Nubian women. See images in KEIMER, *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l’Égypte ancienne*, figs. 12, 12a, Pl. XIV, XV.

31 MORRIS, “Paddle Dolls and Performance,” pp. 86, 102–103. “The faience truncated figurines in particular frequently bear the diamond-shaped tattoo marks common to the dancer and the paddle doll alike. [...] These female figurines should be interpreted as the sacred performers that gladdened the heart of the goddess (Hathor) and raised her radiant father (Re).”

32 Each of the three royal funerary complexes located at Deir el-Bahari (Mentuhotep II, Hatshepsut, and Thutmose III) are assumed to have had shrines dedicated to the goddess Hathor. Shrines dedicated to Hathor were associated with the funerary temples of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. While no shrine dedicated by Mentuhotep II has been found, scholars surmise that such a shrine existed due to the high-status burials of Priestesses of Hathor in the king’s funerary complex and due to the large amount of votive objects dedicated to Hathor which have been found in and around the funerary complex. See PINCH, *Votive Objects to Hathor*, p. 22.

33 See Figure 3: clay figurine found in Cemetery T in Adindan. It is noteworthy that of the six areas on which Pinch concentrated her study of votive offerings to Hathor, five are located outside of Egypt proper and two are in Nubia: Faras and Mirgissa. Associated with the wilderness and areas beyond the Nile Valley, Hathor was rightly worshipped at the turquoise mines of Sinai (as *nb.t mfkz.t* “mistress of turquoise”) and at Egyptian fortresses located in Nubia. Each of the Nubian shrines was built by a local administrator atop an older Nubian shrine where Hathor was worshipped by the local community (Faras – Hathor of “Lady of Ibshek,” Mirgissa – Hathor, “Lady of Iqen.”): see PINCH, *Votive Offerings to Hathor*, pp. 26, 42.

Figure 2. Tattooed
figurine belonging
to Neferhotep
the Bowman ©
Musée du Louvre,
Dist. RMN-Grand
Palais.





Figure 3. Tomb 51, Cemetery T, Adindan, C-Group Phase IIb.

Henhenit. Furthermore, the pictures of ʿAshayet on her sarcophagus gave her a rich chocolate Nubian complexion, and her companion Kemsit was painted on hers an actual ebony black, just like these little figures.”³⁴ Winlock’s frank description of these priestesses as Nubian makes Pinch’s efforts to deny a Nubian connection for the fertility figurines excavated in the same area highly suspect. While Pinch notes that the figurines found in Mentuhotep II’s funerary complex bear markings paralleled on C-Group fertility figurines, she refers to the mummies of the priestesses of Hathor described above to declare that neither the figurines nor the priestesses were Nubian women:

This need not mean that the Egyptian figurines represent Nubians, since three 11th dynasty mummies of *light-skinned* women with tattoos on their thighs, stomachs, and shoulders were recovered from the precincts of Akh-isut (funerary complex of *Neb-ḥepet-Re* Mentuhotep II).³⁵

Pinch’s assertion that the mummies themselves were “light-skinned” is ludicrous. The melanin that provides skin color does not survive mummification and burial for 4,000 years undamaged and unchanged. However, the depiction of the women in their funerary chapels does indicate that they showed marked Nubian features. A more balanced interpretation of the possible ethnicity of these women is found in Ellen Morris’s discussion of Middle Kingdom paddle dolls:

The visibility of Nubian styles in the court of Nebhepetre has been much discussed, and this co-occurrence of bodily decoration in the Theban court and in Nubia need not be a coincidence.³⁶

Indeed, if the performances in the Hathor temple re-enacted this goddess’ return from Nubia and subsequent mollification by her devotees, Nubian dancers would have been particularly appropriate performers in such a celebration.

While no evidence of tattooed Egyptians has been found before or during the Middle Kingdom,³⁷ several contemporary tattooed female mummies have been found in C-Group burials in Lower Nubia and at Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt. Even earlier depictions of tattooed women have been found in Nubia and Sudan.

³⁴ WINLOCK, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahari 1911–1931*, pp. 129–130.

³⁵ PINCH, *Votive Offering to Hathor*, pp. 212–213. Emphasis added.

³⁶ MORRIS, “Paddle Dolls and Performance,” pp. 80–81.

³⁷ TASSIE, “Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia,” p. 92.

Rare figurines of tattooed or cicatrized steatopygous women are also associated with burials of the Nubian A-Group and Sudanese Kadada cultures. Figures with even more exaggerated features and tattooing appear in Saharan rock art as well as Nubian C-Group pottery drawings and figures.³⁸

Firth discovered a tattooed woman in Cemetery 110 near Kubban, across the Nile from Dakka, in Lower Nubia (*Wawat*).³⁹ This area was the northernmost of three traditional C-Group population centers in Lower Nubia.⁴⁰

Three tattooed women were excavated in the Middle Kingdom Nubian cemetery at Hierakonpolis (HK27C), discovered in 2001.⁴¹ A sizeable, reasonably prosperous, C-Group community resided at Hierakonpolis. Its members were not the typical settlements of Nubian mercenaries; the community consisted of entire families. Of those 100 individuals excavated thus far, three women have been found to have tattoos. One of the tattooed women was buried with a brightly colored and intricately perforated leather garment, probably a skirt.⁴² Such skirts have been found in burials in Kerma and at the C-Group site of Kubbaniya, 70 kilometers south of Hierakonpolis, near Aswan at the First Cataract. Finds at Deir el-Bahari suggest that this skirt, part of C-Group woman's traditional attire, was associated with the performance of dancing and musical rites for Hathor. Winlock described figurines found at Deir el-Bahari that wore a similar type of skirt:

These figures obviously represent negro slave girls from far up the Nile, jet black and wearing strange skirts covered with barbarous designs in gaudy colors, and many colored beads around their foreheads and necks.⁴³

Friedman notes the appearance of such articles of clothing in the C-Group cemetery at Hierakonpolis:

38 KENDALL, "Ethnoarchaeology," p. 655 with references. Images of tattooed C-Group figurines are found in WENIG, *Africa in Antiquity*, vol. 2, pp. 124-125, 127-128. The practice of tattooing is attested in Meroitic Nubia at Aksha at the 2nd Cataract, not far south of Abu Simbel and Faras, where male and female mummies exhibited blue tattoos in similar positions to those on the C-Group mummies. Some mummies at Aksha also bore face and hand tattoos: VILA, *Aksha II*.

39 FIRTH, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia*, p. 54. The tattooed female was buried in cemetery 110 near the village of Kubban (grave 271).

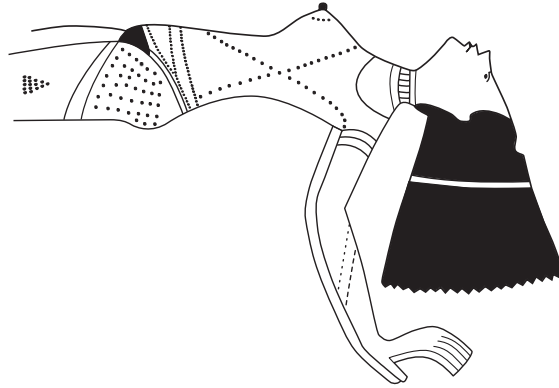
40 Ibid., 48-50, 62-63, 163. The largest cemeteries from north to south are located in those three areas at Dakka, Aniba, and Abu Simbel/Ballana/Adindan.

41 PIERI & ANTOINE, "A Tattooed Trio at HK27C," pp. 28-29; FRIEDMAN & PAULSON, "More Tattoos!" p. 26; HAFSAAS, *Cattle Pastoralists*, p. 64; FRIEDMAN, "The Nubian Cemetery at Hierakonpolis, Egypt," p. 47. The tattooed women were found in graves 9, 10, and 36.

42 FRIEDMAN, "The Nubian Cemetery at Hierakonpolis," pp. 49-50.

43 WINLOCK, *Excavations at Deir el Bahri 1911-1931*, p. 129.

Figure 4
Ramesside dancer
with tattoos
on arm and
thigh wearing
perforated
leather skirt.
From Vandier
D'Abbadie, 1959:
Pl. CXXIII (2868).



Garments made of a patchwork of brown, beige, pink, red, and yellow leather panels were found in several graves, but almost exclusively those of women. In these cases, they may be the multi-coloured skirts as described by Reisner [Kerma] (1923, 304), discussed by Junker [Kubbaniya] (1925, 18) and depicted on Nubian women in the tomb of Huy (Davies and Gardiner 1926, pl. xxx; colour facsimile in Wilkinson 1983, fig. 42).⁴⁴

Similar attire is seen on tattooed dancers on Ramesside ostraca, one of which, clearly shows dancing girls, some of whom are tattooed in a manner similar to the female in Tomb 9 (Hierakonpolis), wearing cut-work, presumably, leather loincloths as part of their special performance apparel.⁴⁵

Thus, the tradition of tattooing women in Nubia is long-lived and indigenous. Tattooing may well have served as a cultural marker for many Nubian tribes, which was incorporated later into the attire of Egyptian Hathoric dancers. Employing the Nubian tradition of tattooing effectively linked Hathoric dancers with the goddess because Hathor was so closely associated with Nubia, as a goddess who originated/sojourned in Nubia and returned to Egypt with a retinue of worshippers from the many tribes of Nubia.⁴⁶

The *ksks*-dance

Attestations of Nubian women dancers are found in tomb decorations of the New Kingdom. The late Ramesside tomb of Ki-nebu in

⁴⁴ FRIEDMAN, "The Nubian Cemetery at Hierakonpolis," pp. 49–50.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 49 n. 4. For image, see PECK, *Egyptian Drawings*, pl. VI [ostrakon Turin 7052] and fig. 68 [ostrakon IFAO 3190].

⁴⁶ See the section titled "Hathor Returns to Medamud" below for reference to a hymn engraved in hieroglyphs on that temple's walls, which gives names of individual Nubian tribes along with their traditional form of worship of the goddess Hathor.



Figure 5. Dancers from Tomb of Ki-nebu TT 113. From Henri Wild, *Kush* 7 (1959): pl. XIX.

Thebes (TT 113)⁴⁷ contains a wall painting of four female dancers, three of whom were daughters of Ki-nebu. The fourth dancer, a black woman, bore the Egyptian name Rekhtoui-em-Mut.⁴⁸ Dressed, like the daughters of Ki-nebu, in a diaphanous full-length gown, which fully reveals her body through the sheer fabric, Rekhtoui-em-Mut alone wears earrings and bracelets, her forearms decorated with tattoos.⁴⁹ In each of several scenes, the dancer raises her right arm, her left arm extended down behind her.

A dancing girl depicted in a similar pose, with both arms extended, one up and one down behind her, decorates a leather drumhead found in Akhmim. There, the small girl dances on a platform before the goddess Isis while a woman plays the tambourine behind the dancer. Although the text before the seated goddess identifies her as Isis, the face of Hathor, identifiable by her tresses and cow ears, decorates the wall above the scene. Another dancer is depicted performing the same dance in a rock tomb in Debeira, 20 kilometers north of Wadi Halfa near the Second Cataract in Nubia. The image decorates the upper half of the north wall, where a banqueting scene includes the image of the dancer surrounded by five female musicians. The tomb belonged to Djehuty-hotep, who was “Chief of Teh-khet” (*wr thht* – Serra, north of the Second Cataract), *hrp* of the queen, and “scribe of the south.”⁵⁰ He is thought to have lived during the reign of Hatshepsut in the early Eighteenth Dynasty when Egypt was reestablishing its rule over Nubia.⁵¹ Kneeling before the dancer, three women clap the beat, while to the right a woman plays the double flute and to the left another woman plays a long, narrow drum with two heads (barrel drum) suspended by a cord over her shoulder. While the five musicians are painted light-brown, the central dancer is a very dark color, almost black. She strikes a pose

47 PORTER and MOSS, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Statues, Reliefs and Paintings*, 1:231.

48 WILD, “Un danse nubienne d’époque pharaonique,” pp. 81–83. The inscription above the dancer identifies her as a family servant (*hm.t*).

49 See *ibid.*, pl. XIX which contains two scenes featuring the Nubian dancer, one of which is reproduced here as Figure 5.

50 SÄVE-SÖNDBERGH, “The Paintings in the Tomb of Djehuty-Hetep in Debeira,” pp. 27–29; WILD, “Un danse nubienne,” 76.

51 *Ibid.*

similar to the dancers described above – her right hand extended upward before her while her left hand extends down behind her.

The name of the dance described in each of the scenes above is preserved in the tomb of Ki-nebu in Thebes. Called the *ksks*-dance,⁵² this relatively rare term is found in an inscription from El-Kab and on a papyrus containing the Rituals of Mut. The El-Kab inscription states, “The *krw* dance (*ꜥb < iꜥb*), the *kwr* dances (*ksks*).”⁵³ Both Egyptian words for “dance” (*iꜥb* and *ksks*) describe the action of a different performer. *Krw*, interpreted by Wild as “baboon”⁵⁴ may refer to the gods Shu and Thoth who transformed themselves into primates to dance before the raging goddess Tefnut. The *kwr* who performed the *ksks*-dance was the king of Kush, *kwr* being an Egyptian rendering of the Meroitic word *qore*, meaning king.⁵⁵ Indeed, in a hieroglyphic text at Edfu, the king is said to have danced in the role of the god Shu before the returning goddess.⁵⁶ In the Esna inscription the *ksks*-dance was associated with the king of Kush. His Nubian subjects also performed the dance.⁵⁷ Brunner-Traut credits the imperial expansion of Egypt during the New Kingdom with the introduction of new foreign dances into the country, noting, however, that Egypt had already been exposed to Nubian dances as early as the Middle Kingdom’s expansion into Nubia and Kush.⁵⁸

The Neck Dance

Kendall has undertaken an ethnographic study that includes a discussion of dance as depicted in Meroitic art and its similarities to

- 52 ERMAN & GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 5: pp. 141–142, 5 *ksks.t* as a Middle Kingdom woman’s title *Tanzerin*. BRUNNER-TRAUT, *Der Tanz im alten Ägypten*, pp. 79–80; id., “Tanz,” p. 216. “*ksks* (Sprungtanz, lebhaft bis wild, besonders für nubische und Negertänze, libysche Tanz).” DARNELL, “Hathor Returns to Medamud,” p. 66.
- 53 WILD, “Un danse nubienne d’époque pharaonique,” p. 86.
- 54 Ibid. Dancing primates feature prominently in the Hymn to Hathor inscribed in the kiosk of the Ptolemaic temple at Medamud, which will be discussed at length below. See DARNELL, “Hathor Returns to Medamud,” pp. 80–84 where *kyky* and *kri* apes are said to praise the goddess with *spn*-staves and *ssndm*-sticks in their hands. Darnell refers to the lute-playing ape depicted in the temple of Hathor at Philae in *ibid.*, n. 190.
- 55 The term *Kwr* was also used as a toponym. See WILD, “Un danse nubienne d’époque pharaonique,” who defined the word Kouri as follows: “région qui constituait ‘pendant une longue période la marche méridionale de l’empire égyptien,’ ou bien le souverain du royaume de Koush.” For the embedded quote, see LECLANT & YOYOTTE, “Les obélisques de Tanis,” p. 72. For *Kwr* as reference to the king of the region, see SAUNERON & YOYOTTE, “La champagne nubienne de Psammétique II et sa signification historique,” fig. 1, p. 185. This Meroitic word for king (*qore*) has an equivalent in the Fur language of Darfur in Western Sudan *aba kuri* = sultan. See ARKELL, “An Egyptian Invasion of the Sudan in 581 B.C.,” p. 94 and *id.*, “Kur,” pp. 123–124.
- 56 JUNKER, *Der Auszug der Hathor-Tefnut aus Nubien*, pp. 31, 45–46, 70–72; *id.*, *Die Onurislegende*, pp. 100–101; BRUNNER-TRAUT, “Tanz,” p. 224 n. 103.
- 57 “Insistons bien [...] que c’est encore le terme *ksks* qui désignerait ainsi la saltation du souverain de Napata, come il désigne la danse nubienne du tombeau de Ki-nébou et les mimiques des babouins venus de Koush.” WILD, “Un danse nubienne d’époque pharaonique,” p. 87.
- 58 BRUNNER-TRAUT, “Tanz,” p. 223, n. 84; *id.*, *Der Tanz im alten Ägypten*, p. 46.

the modern Nubian *rakaba* dance, also known as the “neck dance.” The Kingdom of Meroe (300 BCE–300 CE) consisted of the southern part of Lower Nubia (south of the Second Cataract) to lands that stretched south of the Sixth Cataract. Meroe, the capital city, was located north of the Sixth Cataract and the modern city of Khartoum. The “neck dance” was depicted on the front of the pylon, which stands before the burial of a queen in the royal cemetery of Meroe (Begrawiyah North cemetery tomb 11, abbreviated Beg. N 11). There, female dancers perform a funerary dance, clapping time while others carry palm staves, and throw their heads back in time to the rhythm.⁵⁹

The Nubian *rakaba* dance performed today is accompanied by the beat of the double-headed drum (barrel drum), called a *daluka*, the same drum typically depicted with Nubians in the pharaonic period.⁶⁰ The *rakaba* dance has an important function in modern Nubian culture where it is performed at various community events.⁶¹

This dance is performed in one variation or another at almost all ceremonial occasions, such as child-namings, circumcisions, marriages, zars,⁶² or funerals.⁶³

In 1844, Lepsius witnessed a performance of this dance at a funeral in a small town near Sennar, about 160 miles southeast of Khartoum.

Bending the upper part of their body in convulsive and strained twistings and turnings, and slowly balancing themselves, they move their feet forwards, then suddenly threw their breasts upwards with violence and their heads back on their shoulders, which they stretched out in all directions, and thus with half closed eyes, gradually glided forwards. In this manner they went down a slight incline of fifteen or twenty paces, where they threw themselves on the ground, covered themselves with dust and earth, and turned back again to recommence the same dance. [...] This dancing procession was repeated over and over again. Each of the mourn-

59 Ibid., p. 735 fig. 3.

60 In the tomb of Djehuty-hotep, a girl played the barrel drum to accompany a black woman who performed the *ksks*-dance. See fn. 50.

61 KENDALL, “Ethnoarchaeology,” pp. 658–661.

62 “The term zar, referring both to a ceremony and a class of spirits, is usually associated with Ethiopia and may be of Amharic origin. However, the zar is also found the length of the Nile, from Alexandria to at least Khartoum in the Sudan. In Egyptian Nubia, the purpose of a zar ceremony is to cure mental illnesses through contact with the possessing spirits which cause such maladies.” KENNEDY, “Nubian Zar Ceremonies as Psychotherapy,” p. 185.

63 KENDALL, “Ethnoarchaeology,” p. 659.

Figure 6.
Performance
of the “Neck
Dance” depicted
on the pylon of
a Meroitic royal
burial (Beg. N 11).



ers is compelled at least to go through this once, and the nearer the relationship so much the more frequently it is repeated.⁶⁴

Lepsius's lengthy description could just as well refer to the funerary dance performed by the black woman depicted in the Debeira (Nubia) rock tomb of Djehutyhotep, the drum face from Akhmim or in the Theban tomb of Ki-Nebu: in each case the dancer exhibits twisted shoulders and outstretched arms – one up and one down. The same dance is performed at Nubian wedding ceremonies where it is the bride herself who dances while wedding guests hold apotropaic palm fronds.⁶⁵

Brunner-Traut identified *ksks* as the “national dance” of “die Neger,”

Die Neger haben aber wie die Libyer auch ihren Nationaltanz: Sie drehen bei senkrechter Haltung den Oberkörper und trippeln dabei ganz rasch mit den Füßen an der gleichen Stelle [...]. Soweit es die grossen Fasstrommeln, Holzkeulen und Tierschwänze in den Armen zulassen, mache die Neger lebhaft Sprünge und ausfahrende Gesten [...]. Negertänze sind durch ihre Instrumente und Schmuckgeklirr lärmvoll [...]. Nur ausnahmsweise tanzen auch Negermädchen, aber in einer der äg. Kultiviertheit angeglichenen Weise.⁶⁶

64 LEPSIUS, *Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Peninsula of Sinai*, p. 184, quoted in KENDALL, “Ethnoarchaeology,” p. 660.

65 CROWFOOT, *Popular Rites in the Northern Sudan*, pl. 67a, 68b.

66 BRUNNER-TRAUT, “Tanz,” p. 223.

Negroes, like the Libyans, also have their national dance. They twist their upper bodies in perpendicular position and scuttle with their feet very rapidly in one place [...]. With the large barrel drum, the wooden club, and animal tails worn on the arms, the Negroes perform lively jumps and expansive gestures [...]. Negro dances are noisy on account of their instruments and clanging jewelry[...]. Only as an exception, though, do Negro girls dance in a way that assimilates Egyptian sophistication. (My translation.)

Brunner-Traut's description of "Negro dances" resembles Kendall's description of the "neck dance," which consisted of rapid foot movements in one place and violent swinging of the upper body, accompanied by the beat of the barrel drum and men carrying wooden clubs. The description also sounds very much like what Lepsius witnessed at Sennar: small movements of the feet accompanied by dramatic twisting of the shoulders and upper body accentuated by dramatic extension of both arms. While the body movements could not be captured in the tomb paintings of Ki-nebu, Djehutyhotep, or on the drum face from Akhmim, each painter sought to capture such movement by depicting the twisted shoulders and the outstretched arms.

The erotic and ecstatic nature of the dance cannot be missed: topless women swinging their heads and hair while thrusting their breasts up and forward combined with the pounding of the barrel drums would have created an atmosphere of heightened sexual energy and religious ecstasy.⁶⁷ These are the very characteristics associated with the celebratory festivals performed for the return of Hathor, the goddess of love, music, and dance.

Hathor Returns to Medamud

Contemporary with the early Meroitic period, the Ptolemaic Temple of Hathor at Medamud, near Karnak, contains the most detailed description of Nubian dancers – men and women – arriving to Egypt with the returning Distant Goddess. Built under Ptolemy VIII (170–116 BCE), the temple stands on the site of an earlier, walled sacred grove established during the Old Kingdom and a Middle Kingdom temple, which had been situated on a circular mound. The extant temple of Medamud was connected to the precinct of Montu at Karnak by a row of sphinxes that stretched 8 kilometers between the two sites in Thebes.

67 KENDALL, "Ethnoarchaeology," p. 660. Nubian Muslims have been encouraged to discard this tradition. Orthodox leaders of many Nubian communities prohibit the performance of this ancient dance, because it seems "a sacrilegious desecration in the sight of God." See KENNEDY, *Nubian Ceremonial Life*, p. 226.

Hieroglyphic texts and reliefs decorate the interior west wall of the central kiosk. The texts record a hymn dedicated to the Gold (*Nwh.t*), the goddess Rat-Tawy as Hathor, the returning eye of the sun.⁶⁸ Text columns 7–10 of the hymn record the praise of worshippers who accompanied the goddess on her return to Egypt: Egyptians, foreigners, and animals.⁶⁹ In the second section of the hymn several Nubian tribes, their dances, and attire are described,⁷⁰

Mntyw-people⁷¹ perform the ceremonial *gs*gs-dance (*ksks*) with their (traditional) clothing (*stz.w*),⁷² while the *Styw*-people dance holding their staves (*mdw*);⁷³ the nomads throw themselves down (*sb*n) in front of you, and the inhabitants of Punt (*hbs.tyw*)⁷⁴ declaim (*wšd*) for you.⁷⁵

In texts on the Ptolemaic gate to the enclosure of Mut at Karnak, Puntites are said to bend their hands (in a gesture of worship and praise), while the Libyans dance.⁷⁶ Darnell interprets the action of bending the arm (hand) to be the *hn*-gesture, “appropriate to a Hathoric celebration of nocturnal drunken revelry.”⁷⁷ Both of the actions performed by the people of Punt – declaiming and bending the arm – are strongly associated with the prayer inscriptions of Nubian worshippers found in the Egyptian temples of Lower Nubia during the second and third centuries CE when officials and worshippers arrived from Meroitic Nubia as representatives of the Meroitic king.⁷⁸

68 DARNELL, “Hathor Returns to Medamud,” p. 47.

69 Ibid., p. 48.

70 Ibid., p. 64–79.

71 On the *Mntyw*-people as inhabitants of the southern area of Nubia west of the Nile, see *ibid.* pp. 66–70.

72 A dress with a top that consists of “crossed bands” is the attire sometimes worn by women as they dance for Hathor. “The dancers are entering the gate of the temple, and the use of *št* to describe the costume of the *Mntyw* may be intended to recall the ritual garments *štz n k hr ntr ʿnd štz n mšz ntr* (WB IV, 558, 13–4), appropriate for dancers welcoming the returning goddess.” DARNELL, “Hathor Returns to Medamud,” p. 73. A figurine, decorated with “crossed bands,” was found in the tomb of Neferhotep the Bowman (Nubian) at Deir el Bahari; paddle dolls frequently are decorated in this manner as well. See MORRIS, “Paddle Dolls and Performance,” p. 89, esp. n. 94 and KEIMER, *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l’Égypte ancienne*, pl. XIV–XVII. Nubian women dancers were depicted wearing decorative bands crossed on their torsos in several Ramesside ostraca (see Figure 4), while modern Nubian women can be decorated with cicatrices in this pattern. See *ibid.*, pl. XXXVIII (2).

73 Nubians are depicted with their clubs in the Festival Procession of Opet at Luxor. See THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *The Festival Procession of Opet*, pl. 32 and 94, commentary pp. 16 and 36.

74 ERMAN & GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 3: p. 255, 15–16.

75 DARNELL, “Hathor Returns to Medamud,” p. 64.

76 Ibid., p. 77.

77 Ibid., p. 79. “The *hn*-gesture appears to be particularly associated with the navigation of the returning goddess on her way to the *hieros gamos*.” Ibid., p. 91 with reference to GUTBUB, “Un Emprunt aux textes des pyramides dans l’hymne à Hathor,” p. 61.

78 In those prayer inscriptions, the Nubian priests “call out” (*šll*) to Isis, while one Nubian worshipper speaks of “bending the arm” in praise of the goddess. For *šll*, see GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenos*, vol. 1, p. 182 #341 with reference to

Nubians at Philae

A unique telling of the Myth of the Distant Goddess at Philae indicates the Nubian focus of the rites performed in that temple. In most versions of the Myth of the Distant Goddess, it was Shu, consort of Tefnut, and Thoth who journeyed to Nubia to entice the goddess back to Egypt. However, the myth as it was depicted in text and temple reliefs at Philae, credits Arensnuphis and Thoth Pnubs with having guided Tefnut back to Egypt.⁷⁹ Both Arensnuphis⁸⁰ and Thoth Pnubs⁸¹ were gods worshipped in Nubia and Kush; they are not depicted in Egyptian temples north of Philae. Nubian temple inscriptions engraved in the early Roman period (mid-first century CE) cluster around images of Tefnut, Arensnuphis and Thoth Pnubs, which are prevalent on the columns and walls of the temple forecourt and date to the Ptolemaic Period. This concentration of inscriptions seems to indicate that worship of Tefnut, Arensnuphis and Thoth Pnubs increased in this period.⁸² During the reign of Ptolemy VI (180–145 BCE), the area before the temple of Arensnuphis (at the southern end of the forecourt) was expanded. A cult association added a porch to the front of the temple.⁸³ An upsurge in worshippers, either Egyptian, Nubian, or both, participating in the rites performed for these three gods would have necessitated the structural changes made to this area of the temple complex at Philae. Annexation of Lower Nubia and construction of temples in the area by the Kushite kings Arqamani II and his successor, Adikhalamani, during the Theban Revolt (206–186 BCE), which began in the reign of Ptolemy IV and ended under Ptolemy V, would have provided the opening and the impetus for an increased Nubian participation in the rites performed at Philae.

inscriptions in which the word appears. For the expression “bending the arm” (*hbe n-t rmn(-i)*), see *ibid.*, 121 graffito Ph. 421, line 3.

79 INCONNU-BOCQUILLON, *Le mythe de la Déesse Lointaine à Philae*, p. 336.

80 WENIG, “Arensnuphis und Sebiuwerker,” pp. 130–150.

81 BOYLAN, *Thoth*, pp. 168–172; SAUNERON & YOVOTTE, “La champagne nubienne de Psammétique II et sa signification historique,” pp. 163–167; KURTH, “Thoth,” pp. 510–11; JUNKER, *Die Onurislegende*, pp. 7–11.5

82 HEANY, “A Short Architectural History of Philae,” p. 223, Fig. 3. Cruz-Uribe has suggested that the Kiosk of Nectanebo, relocated in the late Ptolemaic period, served as a shrine dedicated to Thoth Pnubs. See CRUZ-URIBE, *The Demotic Graffiti from the Temple of Isis on Philae Island*, p. 11.

83 See BERNAND, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae*, vol. 2, pp. 116–121 (inscription IGP 11). The Greek inscription commemorated work on the temple of Arensnuphis undertaken by a cult association. The inscription may refer to the addition of the porch, which is no longer standing. See also HAENY, “Short Architectural History of Philae,” p. 220, n. 4.

Roman Period

Doctoral research on the Nubian inscriptions engraved in Egyptian temples of the Dodecaschoenos suggests that worshippers continued to travel to Philae in the early Roman period (mid-first century CE) to perform rites in celebration of Hathor, which coincided with the delivery of the first fruits of the harvest during the season of *Peret*.⁸⁴ This assumption is based on the contents, location, and references to ritual acts in the texts of the inscriptions,⁸⁵ which recorded “agreements” by cult association members to journey annually to Philae from temples in the southern Dodecaschoenos. The annual journey may have been timed to coincide with the first day of a festival celebrating the return of Tefnut to Egypt, which was celebrated at Denderah on 19 *Tybi*, the first month in the season of *Peret*.

Several Nubian inscriptions make reference to wives, daughters, and “all the people who belong to me” being present at the temple with the (male) writer.⁸⁶ I suggest that the wives and daughters who accompanied the Nubian worshippers, priests, and cult association members would have been the women who performed the sacred dances for Hathor that are attested for the earlier pharaonic period: the *ksks*-dance of the C-Group people of Lower Nubia.

Inscribed in Egyptian Demotic in the forecourt, the columned area leading up to the temple that was typically used for public celebration, the gathering of cult association members, and drinking,⁸⁷ one agreement recorded a promise to celebrate rites on a specific evening every year.⁸⁸ Another agreement in the same area made reference to the “procession of the cult association of Thoth Pnubs.”⁸⁹ A prayer inscription, Ph. 28, engraved in 34 CE on a column of the

84 The Egyptian calendar was divided into three seasons: *Akhet* ʔh.t “Inundation,” *Peret* pr.t “Growing,” and *Shemu* šmw “Harvest;” each season consisted of three months of thirty days each. While the final season was called “Harvest,” the collection of “first fruits” occurred in the season of *Peret* as demonstrated by the traditional name of the first month of *Peret*, ʔf-bd.t “swelling of Emmer-Wheat.” Furthermore, presentation of a grain offering at the temples of Esna and Edfu occurred on 8 and 9 *Mechir*, respectively. *Mechir* was the second month of *Peret*. See ALTENMÜLLER, “Feste,” p. 177.

85 I have suggested that Nubians wrote five early Roman period inscriptions found on the dromos at Philae: Ph. 11, Ph. 15, Ph. 24, Ph. 25, and Ph. 36. See ASHBY, *Calling Out to Isis*, pp. 94–112. Three of these five inscriptions are dated to the season of *Peret*. See *ibid.*, pp. 50–113. A calendar of feasts at Denderah indicates that the return of Hathor from Nubia was celebrated with a daily procession from the first day of *Tybi* (first month of *Peret*) – 4th day of *Mechir* (second month of *Peret*).

86 Ph. 254, Ph. 255, Ph. 289, Ph. 411, and Ph. 416. See GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenos*, vol. 1, pp. 84, 90, 113–119.

87 See BADAWY, “The Approach to the Egyptian Temple in the Late and Greco-Roman Periods,” p. 80.

88 Ph. 24 inscribed in 31 CE; the rites were to be performed on day 24 in the third month of *Peret*, the Egyptian month of *Phamenoth*. See GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenos*, vol. 1, p. 45.

89 *Ibid.*, 48. Graffito Ph. 36 was inscribed in 46 CE. “Procession of the cult association of Thoth Pnubs” in Egyptian *Pʔ hʔ tʔ sn.t dhwty pʔ nbs*. Griffith transliterated the term for “council” as *knb.t*, while Hughes read the Demotic word as *sn.t*. Both scholars translated the term as “cult

western colonnade in the forecourt recalled the performance of the ꜥ-k-procession ("Feast of Entry"⁹⁰) to the shrine of Hathor (*t3 gꜥ.t Hwt-Hr*), the "house of greeting" (*pr ꜥy*) and the "place of inebriation" (*p3 m3ꜥ the*).⁹¹ Darnell notes that the Hathor temple at Philae was called "the place of imploring" (*s.t n(t) ꜥs.t*).⁹² The destination of the ꜥ-k-procession may have been the small Hathor temple, located east of the Main Temple at Philae or it may have been a simple shrine erected in the forecourt in the area where the graffito was inscribed.⁹³ Graffito Ph. 28 was also inscribed in *Peret*, in the fourth month of that season. Thus, in the first century CE Nubian worshippers were making an annual journey to Philae to participate in rites for Hathor, Arensnuphis and Thoth Pnubs during the harvest season of *Peret*. Rites enacted in the evening, as promised in Ph. 24, recall the nocturnal celebrations in honor of Hathor, which included drinking, music, dancing, and the *hn*-gesture.⁹⁴ Each of those ritual elements was present in the myth at Medamud.⁹⁵

Circumstantial evidence suggests that such rites were the focus of the early Roman inscriptions at Philae, which were engraved on the structures in the open area in front of the Main Temple. The forecourt was the area traditionally reserved for public celebration of rites, an area accessible to worshippers who were not allowed to enter the temple.⁹⁶ The agreement to arrive at Philae annually on the evening of the 24th day of the third month of *Peret* recalls the invitation to Hathor in the hymn at Medamud to

association." See HUGHES, "The Sixth Day of the Lunar Month and the Demotic Word for 'Cult Guild'," pp. 152–153.

90 GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenos*, p. 133 #7, p. 138 #35. ASHBY, *Calling Out to Isis*, pp. 126–139.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 47 (graffito Ph. 28); KOCKELMANN, "Zur Kultpraxis auf Philae," pp. 113–114.

92 DARNELL, "Hathor Returns to Medamud," p. 50, n. 11.

93 Graffito Ph. 28 was inscribed on column 26 of the western colonnade of the temple forecourt (*dromos*). Kockelmann discusses the possible destinations of the ꜥ-k-procession in KOCKELMANN, "Zur Kultpraxis auf Philae," pp. 114–118. I tend to agree with Pope's suggestion that the cult statue was carried to a shrine (no longer extant) erected on the *dromos*. See, *ibid.*, p. 114 n. 125; POPE, "The Demotic Proskynema of a Meroïte Envoy to Roman Egypt," p. 80.

94 References to nocturnal celebrations for Hathor appear in the tomb of Kheruef, royal scribe and steward of the Eighteenth Dynasty Queen Tiye. In a depiction of dancers and musicians performing jubilee celebrations for her husband, Amenhotep III, hieroglyphic text above acrobatic dancers reads, "You spend all night, exalted one, being exalted." An address to Hathor found above another relief scene of dancers reads, "Pr[ay] to make jubilation for The Gold [...].! Come, arise, come that I may make for you jubilation at twilight (*h3wy*) and music in the evening. O Hathor, you are exalted in the hair of Re, in the hair of Re, for to you has been given the sky there, deep night, and the stars. Great is her majesty when she is appeased." THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *The Tomb of Kheruef*, p. 47, pl. 34.

95 DARNELL, "Hathor Returns to Medamud," p. 49.

96 BADAWY, "The Approach to the Egyptian Temple in the Late and Greco-Roman Periods," p. 84 with reference to the hymn for Hathor at Medamud; CAYZAC, "Sur le parvis du temple d'Isis," pp. 47, 49.

[c]ome, oh Golden One who eats of praise, because the food of her desire is dancing, who shines on the festival at the time of lighting (the lamps), who is content with the dancing at night. Come! The procession is in the place of inebriation [...].⁹⁷

Contemporary with the Nubian inscriptions at Philae, a tomb near Rome contains a relief in which this type of celebration is depicted,

a dance in which the dancers and spectators are undoubtedly Africans, that is, Egyptians and Negroes [...], three central participants, rather steatopygic Negro women, dressed in long transparent tunics, whose violent dance involves bending the knees and tossing back the head.⁹⁸

Nubian women, then, were featured participants as dancers and musicians and perhaps even as personifications of the goddess Hathor⁹⁹ in Egyptian rites beginning in the Middle Kingdom, down through the Roman period in Egypt, and in rites celebrated as far away as Rome. Perhaps depictions of Nubian women as Hathoric dancers through millennia of Egyptian art caused those black women to be perceived as essential participants in the rites performed for Hathor and bestowed an air of legitimacy and antiquity on the performance of those rites. Jean Leclant describes the spread of Egyptian religious practices celebrated for Isis (to whom Hathor had become assimilated) throughout the Greco-Roman world. He emphasized the pivotal role played by African celebrants in those rites:

When the cult of the Isiac gods spread through the Greek world, it was often established by authentic Egyptian priests, as was the case at Delos, for instance. Their part in the installation and propagation of the cult guaranteed the genuineness of the Egyptian rites. The use of black personnel in the Isiac temples in Italy during the Roman period probably sprang from this same concern for authenticity, but even more, it seems, from a heightened taste for the exotic. Blacks as priests, musicians, and dancers lent an African flavor to the ceremonies, just as the ancient statues and sculptures brought from Egypt to decorate the temples of Isis gave them an Egyptian cast, which was meant to plunge the initiated in a very special atmosphere, thus captivating both their senses and their

97 Translation by DARNELL, "Hathor Returns to Medamud," 50.

98 SNOWDEN, *Blacks in Antiquity*, p. 191.

99 AUSTIN & GOBEL, "Embodying the Divine." While Austin does not suggest that the tattooed mummy was Nubian, she does make the powerful suggestion that priestesses of Hathor embodied the goddess during the performance of religious rites. This belief is central to many African religious traditions, where the priest and, in fact, any worshipper can be "ridden" by the deity and, thereby, come to embody the god.

minds [...]. Dances by blacks could therefore be performed as part of Isiac feasts like that of the November Isia, in which the death and resurrection of Osiris were acted out [...]. One may also admit the presence of blacks in the sacred Isiac dramas. According to Suetonius, for the night after Caligula was murdered a spectacle was being prepared in which "scenes from the underworld" were to be played by Egyptians and "Ethiopians."¹⁰⁰

I would like to suggest that a similar taste for authenticity and for the exotic motivated Middle Kingdom Egyptians to incorporate C-Group dancers and musicians into their ritual practices celebrated in the cult of Hathor.

It is not certain that the C-Group women perceived their role in the Hathoric rites in the same manner as the Egyptians did. The reader will recall that the traditional "neck dance" was performed at a variety of celebrations: child namings, weddings, "welcome dances," and funerals. The "wildness" of the dance was not specifically meant to portray sexuality, although sexuality was very much inherent in the dance.

Although tattooed Black females are often represented as sex symbols on Egyptian toilette objects, one cannot assume that the tattoo had similar erotic connotations in Nubian society. No such objects have heretofore been discovered in any Nubian context. Whether or not tattoo had the same erotic overtones for the Nubian peoples as it apparently did for the Egyptians is open to discussion.¹⁰¹

Celebration of the fecundity of women and their ability to produce family lineages was central to the Nubian interpretation of a woman's role in society. Traditional women's dances would have celebrated that power which included sexuality, but was not solely limited to an erotic performance. Rather the dances captured the power of woman to continue the family lineage, the central organizing principle of Nubian society. The mother's central role is demonstrated in Meroitic-language funerary inscriptions found in Nubia. In those texts, the name of the mother consistently preceded that of the father and kinship lineages may have been traced through the maternal line. Hathor's apotropaic protection of women in childbirth as well as her role as ecstatic celebrant of sexuality and spiritual drunkenness resonates nicely with the vital role of women in the continuation of the kinship lineages in Nubian society.

¹⁰⁰ LECLANT, "Egypt," pp. 282-286.

¹⁰¹ BIANCHI, "Tattoo in Ancient Egypt," p. 24.

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An Old Nubian Letter from the Daughter of an Eparch

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei and Alexandros Tsakos

Askut is a small island in the area immediately upstream from the Second Cataract, where Middle Kingdom pharaohs had constructed a series of fortresses to guarantee the safety of their southern frontier, safeguard trade interests, and help riverine communication in this very rocky landscape, which has accurately received the name Batn el-Hajjar (Belly of the Rocks). The Middle Kingdom fortress of Askut was occupied in subsequent periods too, and the excavations of the University of California at Los Angeles in the 1960s have revealed remains of Christian Nubian culture.¹

On January 18, 1963, the UCLA excavation uncovered a letter written in Old Nubian at the Northern end of the West Poemorium at 50 cm depth, near a group of late Christian period houses. At its present state, its entire length and most probably its entire width have been preserved. The publication of the letter was entrusted to Sergio Donadoni, but remained in draft form, like the rest of the publication on Askut prepared by Alexander Badawy. Together with the other Askut materials, the letter was kept at the University of California Los Angeles. In 2015, Stuart Tyson Smith from UC Santa Barbara, who took over care of the Askut material, entrusted the publication to the present authors. The following is an independent attempt to decipher this previously unknown Old Nubian letter, although Donadoni's notes have been consulted.²

1 Badawy, "Askut," pp. 124–25.

2 The authors would like to thank Dr. Stuart Tyson Smith from UC Santa Barbara and Dr. Wendy Teeter, Curator of Archaeology, Fowler Museum at UCLA, for granting the permission to publish this document.

Fig. 1, 2.
Photos by
the late
Alexander
Badawy
(Courtesy of
Stuart Tyson
Smith and
the Fowler
Museum at
UCLA).



Dimensions: ca. 20 x 5 cm, Nubian-type majuscules, black ink.
Date: 12th century (?) – see general commentary

Transcription

Recto

- + ΔΑΟΥΜΕΛΩ ΜΑΡΙΑΜΗ ΣΟΓΟΘΙΑΣΧ̄ [π]ᾶρρε οὔ[εχ̄]
2 ΠΗΚΗΤῆΚΑ ΕΙΝ ΚΑΡΤΕ ΑΡΡΙΚ[α] ΤΙΘΩΔΗ[α]
ΣΟ ΓΑΓΓΙΝΑΤΕ ΜΟΡΙῆ ΠΑΙCΧ̄ ἡ[2-3]οὔ[ε] . [2-4]
4 ΜΙΝΝΑ ΕΙΛΛΑΛΩ ΓΕΜΟΥ ΓΕΜΟΥ ἡΚΑ ΕΙΛ
ΕΙΤΚΑ ΤΙΘΩΙΜΕΝΕῆ ΠΑΡΕΚΑ ΤΕ[κ]ΚΑ [τ]ῖδῶι . [0-2]
6 ΚΕΛΛΩΚΑ ΠΑΠῆ ΓΑΔΑΚΑ ΠΕCῆΝ ΔΗΝΑCΩ –

Verso

+ ΜΑΡΙΑΜ ΣΟΓΟΘΙΑCΧ̄ ΧΑΗΛ CΟΥ[ΝΤΟ]ΥΟΥC [- - -]

Translation

Recto

I, eparch daughter Mariamē, greet (the owners of) the second plot of the share! Give (pl.) them this brought letter. He who writes without denial says that he does not (...) If for many years you didn't give the message to them, (and) if (?) you give the plot to them, may he say, telling everything to the son (?) of the elder.

Verso

Mariam, the eparch daughter, (to) Chael, the scribe (?)

Grammatical commentary

Recto

- 1 ΔΑΟΥΜΕΛΩ: unattested variant of the standard letter greeting ΔΑΟΥΜΕΛΟ “I greet you.” The usage of this verb suggests that the addressee has equal or lower status.
ΜΑΡΙΑΜΗ: proper name, “Mariamē,” elsewhere attested in P. QI III 41.3, 16; in P. QI II 21.5 we find ΜΑΡΙΜΗ. Note that in the address the name is spelled ΜΑΡΙΑΜ.

COFOΘĪCΛ: unattested composite title “daughter of the eparch” or “eparch daughter” based on COFOΘ “eparch” (OND³ 160) and ḁC “daughter” (OND 20), followed by the determiner -λ, possibly with supralinear stroke. Subject of 1 ΔΔΟΥΜΕΛΩ. The same title also appears in the address.

[Π]ἈΡΡΕ: “plot, field” (OND 147).

ΟΥ[ΕΛ]: “second” (OND 134).

2 ΠΗΚΗΤῆΚΑ: previously unattested variant of ΠΙΓΓ “share” (OND 151), followed by genitive -ῆ and accusative -ΚΑ. [Π]ἈΡΡΕ ΟΥ[ΕΛ] ΠΗΚΗΤῆΚΑ is the direct object of 1 ΔΔΟΥΜΕΛΩ (see discussion below). Perhaps the formulation is shorthand for “the owners of the second field of the share.”

ΕΙΝ: “this” (OND 70).

ΚΑΡΤΕ: “letter” (OND 85).

ΑΡΡΙΚ[Α]: participial form of ΑΡΡ- “to bring” (OND 17) followed by present tense -λ, regressively assimilated to -κ before accusative -Κ[Α]. Object of ΤΙΘḂΑ[Α]CΟ. ΕΙΝ ΚΑΡΤΕ ΑΡΡΙΚ[Α] refers to the letter itself.

ΤΙΘḂΑ[Α]CΟ: ΤῚ “to give” (OND 174) with pluractional marker -Ḃ, referring to the indirect objects, who are different from the addressee. Note that the imperative suffix -Αῆ[Α]CΟ is a 2/3 plural form referring to the 1 [Π]ἈΡΡΕ ΟΥ[ΕΛ] ΠΗΚΗΤῆΚΑ.

3 ΕΛΓΓΙΝΑḂΕ: previously unattested variant of ΕΛΓΓΝΑḂΕ “denial” (OND 194).

ΜΟΡΙῆ: perhaps from ΜΟΡ “be without” (OND 120), followed by the present 2/3 singular -ῆῆ. Dependent on ΠΑΙCḂ.

ΠΑΙCḂ: ΠΑΡ “to write” (OND 145), with past 2 -C and determiner -Ḃ. Participle meaning “writing” or “the one who writes.” For the construction ΕΛΓΓΙΝΑḂΕ ΜΟΡΙῆ ΠΑΙCḂ, cf. P.QI III 31.10 ΕΛΓΓΙΚῆΨΑΛΟῦ ΠΑΕΙCΑΛΟ “written without denial.”

4 ΜΙΝΝΑ: possibly the negative verb ΜΙΝ “to not be” (OND 114), with progressively assimilated present tense -λ and predicate marker -Α as a verb in a complement clause dependent on ΕΙΛΛΑΛΩ.

ΕΙΛΛΑΛΩ: possibly ΕΙΛ “to say” (OND 68), with present tense -λ, predicate marker -Α, and focus marker -ΛΩ. As no subject clitic is present, the subject must be overt, perhaps 3 ΠΑΙCḂ. It is unclear who the subject or referent of this verb is, but it may well be another scribe (see commentary below).

ΓΕΜΟΥ ΓΕΜΟ ῆΚΑ: attested variant of ḂΕΜ “year” (OND 27, 189), reduplicated. Whereas the first instance is unmarked, the second instance has genitive -ῆ followed by accusative ending -ΚΑ. This may indicate a duration of the form “for years and years, for

3 OND refers to BROWNE, *Old Nubian Dictionary*. Other textual sigla follow the standard abbreviation practices.

many years” vel sim. Browne translates a similar reduplication in Kanarti 2 ⲟⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲟⲗⲧⲟⲩⲕⲁ with “yearly meal.”

ⲉⲓⲗⲉⲓⲧⲕⲁ: the letters at the end of line 4 are difficult to read and we follow Donadoni’s transcription here. Perhaps the same root as 4 ⲉⲓⲗⲗⲁⲱ, ⲉⲓⲗ “to say” (OND 68), with nominalizer -ⲉⲓⲧ, thus “message,” and accusative case -ⲕⲁ, as object of ⲧⲓⲟⲩⲙⲉⲛⲉⲛ. The content of the message, perhaps the same as 6 ⲕⲉⲗⲗⲱⲕⲁ “everything,” or perhaps “the whole story,” is only implied.

5 ⲧⲓⲟⲩⲙⲉⲛⲉⲛ: ⲧⲣ “to give” with pluractional marker -ⲟ, referring to the indirect object, negative suffix -ⲙⲉⲛ, and present 2/3 singular -ⲉⲛ. This appears to be the protasis of a conditional clause.

ⲡⲁⲣⲉⲕⲁ: a variant of ⲡⲁⲣⲣⲉ “field” (OND 147), possibly direct object of [ⲧ]ⲓⲟⲩⲓ. This is probably the same field as mentioned in l. 1.

ⲧⲉ[ⲕ]ⲕⲁ: accusative of 3 singular pronoun ⲧⲁⲣ. Very tentative reconstruction, indirect object of [ⲧ]ⲓⲟⲩⲓ.

[ⲧ]ⲓⲟⲩⲓ: remnant of a verb (perhaps ⲧⲣ as suggested by Donadoni) with a pluractional marker -ⲟ. Perhaps [ⲧ]ⲓⲟⲩⲓ[ⲛⲓ]?

6 ⲕⲉⲗⲗⲱⲕⲁ: ⲕⲉⲗⲗⲱ “all” (OND 88), with accusative, object of ⲡⲉⲥⲓⲛⲁ.

ⲡⲁⲡⲓⲛ: ⲡⲁⲡ “father” (OND 144), with genitive. Perhaps a more general meaning as “elder” is preferable here, as “son of the father” appears to make less sense.

[ⲉ]ⲗⲗⲕⲁ: very tentative reconstruction. Perhaps ⲉⲗⲗ “son” (OND 196), with accusative case. Indirect object of ⲡⲉⲥⲓⲛ.

ⲡⲉⲥⲓⲛ: ⲡⲉⲥ “to say, speak” (OND 149), with present tense 2/3 singular -ⲓⲛ. Possibly a subordinate clause dependent on 6 ⲁⲛⲛⲁⲥⲱ

ⲁⲛⲛⲁⲥⲱ: perhaps ⲁⲛ “to say” (OND 11), with present tense 2/3 singular -ⲓⲛ, predicative -ⲁ, and command marker -ⲙⲱ. If correct, the meaning here may be jussive, “may you/he say.” As the addressees of the letter are plural, “he” seems the most plausible. The reconstruction is very tentative, and it may well be a single (unattested) verbal form ⲡⲉⲥⲓⲛⲁⲛⲛⲁⲥⲱ vel sim.

Verso

1 ⲥⲟⲩ[ⲛⲧⲟ]ⲩⲟⲩⲉ: ⲥⲟⲩⲛⲧⲟⲩⲟⲩⲉ “scribe” (OND 162).

General Commentary

The letter from Askut shows some particularities that to our knowledge are unique for Old Nubian correspondence. For example, this is the only letter where the greeting formula is followed by the name of the sender, a certain ⲥⲟⲩⲟⲩⲓⲁⲥ or “daughter of the *soḥoj*.” Although this term has not been previously attested in the Old Nubian corpus, it appears analogous to the formation ⲉⲟⲛⲛⲁⲥ or “queen/royal

sister”⁴ and must refer to the daughter of an eparch (*sohoj*) under the Makuritan king.

Although the author of the letter is clear, its addressee(s) are less so. The address mentions as addressee the scribe Chael, but this does not seem to be the person greeted in the opening lines of the letter, 1–2 [π]ᾶρρε οὐ[ε]λ πικητῆκα “the (owners of) the second plot of the share.” As it is unsyntactical to interpret this phrase as anything but the object of 1 ΔΑΟΥΜΕΛΩ, the plural subject of the imperative 2–3 ΤΙΘΔΑΝ[Α]CΟ must refer to them as well. The letter, although addressed to the scribe, thus appears to carry a message intended for a group of people who are the owners of a share in a plot of land, who then are requested to give 2 ΕΙΝ ΚΑΡΤΕ ΑΡΡΙΚΣ[Α] “this brought letter” to an unnamed them. So based on the address and the people introduced in the first two lines, we are dealing with at least four parties related to the affair: princess Mariamē, scribe Chael, the owners of the second plot, and an unspecified fourth party.

Chael is only mentioned as addressee, while the letter itself is referred to in the text as “this brought letter.” This may support the idea that Chael was acting as an intermediary. If scribes had the authority to represent other parties, Chael was representing Mariamē, delivering her letter to the owners of the plot in question. It cannot be excluded, however, that he was initially representing the owners of the plot and after some contact with the princess he was asked to deliver her reply to them. Finally, he might have been representing a third party, for example the state or local authorities intervening in an affair related with land property, agricultural output thereof, or related affairs.

Scribes have been attested as representatives of other people, most interestingly in P.QI III 41, where a scribe Isakē is a representative (πecχ, lit. “speaker”) of Maia in a sale to a certain Mariamē.⁵ Although the office of Mariamē is not mentioned, it is a tantalizing possibility that we are dealing here with the same Mariamē as the author of the Askut letter. In P.QI III 41, scribe Isakē finishes the letter with the curse that

May whoever of Mariami’s scribes will disparage (me by saying)
“that which is after/behind me is not mine” become estranged from
God, and in the Apocalypse may the seventh seal(?) come forth upon
him.⁶

Could it be that Chael is one of the scribes of Mariamē that is warned here by Isakē? Also our letter may show the presence of

4 See VAN GERVEN OEI, “A Dance for a Princess,” pp. 123, 130.

5 See also RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, p. 138.

6 BROWNE, *Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim III*, p. 41. Translation amended.

No matter the identification of and precise relations between the different parties involved in this affair, both this letter and P.QI III 41 appear to imply that Mariamē, the addressees of the Askut letter, and Maia from P.QI III 41 had scribes like Chael and Isakē at their disposal to represent them in sales and other legal contexts. This leaves us with three possible scenarios:

1. It is a mere coincidence that both letters use scribes as representatives. Although this interpretation is difficult to refute, it is also highly unsatisfying.
2. Scribes were employed in Makuria as representatives in legal matters and were not simply the incidental “writers” of a document. In P.QI III 32.22–23, a scribe David describes himself as being part of the “retinue of the priest of king David George,” and as “assembling and sitting with [his] elders” in P.QI III 36.ii.6. Furthermore, scribes were often (high) members of the clergy and could hardly be expected to have had a mere administrative function. The letters of Princess Mariamē and Maia, however, clearly show that scribes had an active representative function in Makuritan commercial life.
3. The scribes are used as intermediaries because of the gender of authors, which would not allow them to enter into direct contact with, for example, men that are not family. One might think that in this scenario, Mariamē is somehow at a disadvantage, if she needed scribes such as Chael to mediate. This is, however, not in accordance with the general tone of the letter (e.g., the use of imperatives and the usage of ΔΑΟΥΗΜΕΛΩ instead of honorific ΔΟΥΚΗΜΕΛΩ) and the way we generally understand women’s role in Christian Nubia, taking into account the fact that they could own churches and participate freely in cases of land-ownership.⁷ Thus Princess Mariamē belongs rather to a privileged social class of Christian Nubia rather than to an underprivileged gender in Makuritan society.

7 See RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, pp. 1–2.

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The Effects of Relocation on Nubian Women's Health

Hanna Paesler

“[U]prooting or resettling people is a dramatic human event that creates stress, produces stress reaction, and requires the use of strategies to cope with a wide range of pressures. [...] Forced migration or resettlement constitutes an abrupt form of social change. It is disruptive, occasionally tragic, and in many cases generates irreversible problems.”¹

Introduction

Community relocation schemes have become a worldwide phenomenon. This quote shows their dramatic effects and some of its problems. No matter how much governments campaign for the people affected, this political decision always entails an abrupt change to their living environment, their habits and lifestyle and their whole culture. This was the situation of the Nubians in southern Egypt and northern Sudan when the Egyptian government decided to build a high dam south of Aswan and to relocate the Nubians.

In the literature on Nubian relocation in 1963 and 1964, it is striking that there were many promises made to the Nubians concerning their quality of life. The governments of Egypt and Sudan established committees with the objective of considering cultural aspects in planning the relocation, with an expected improvement in living standards.² This means that several studies on Nubian culture were incorporated into the planning. Ethnologists advised the commit-

¹ FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. vii.

² Ibid, p. 35 and FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, pp. 3–4. Though reckoning their approach in retrospect, one is tempted to suspect that they pursued the goal of “optimizing” Nubian culture to their own agenda.

tees on kin relationships, village structures and architecture, agriculture, climate conditions, infrastructure, etcetera.³

Some of these things were adopted in the new villages but most did not receive any attention. Thus, the ideas of the planning committees for quality of life were often considered for the Nubians, but in reality the Nubians' standard of living was frequently subordinated to the general good of the country. In all the considerations, however, I have not found any data on the scaling of healthcare issues. Most probably it was assumed that improved health conditions would automatically occur because of planned medical facilities and good infrastructure, but concerns arise if that is the case. Especially in the area of women's health, the data available from the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region) is alarming.

Unfortunately, in general few considerations regarding Nubian women were taken into account during the planning. Important cultural aspects were considered only from a male perspective, as the advising Nubian delegations were composed of men only.⁴

In a culture that is characterized by gender segregation, such counsel is one-sided and incomplete. Resettlement meant a much bigger culture shock for a Nubian woman than for a man. It was expected that a 15-year-old young man would leave the village and look for work in one of the big cities or another country. In contrast, it was expected that a woman would not leave her village, so women's culture shock should have been expected and considered with much greater attention.

Against this background is the question of how this major lifestyle change affected the health of women. Traditions, lifestyle habits and conditions all have an influence on the health conditions of a population. The World Health Organization constitution states that "The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being." Political decisions and international projects should particularly include women's health, as it has an effect on the wellbeing of a whole society. Nevertheless, this point does not seem to have been taken into consideration concerning the relocation of the Nubians.

Health or illness changes are influenced through transculturation. Transculturation is a process that happens in every culture all the time but never implies the entire culture, only subareas.⁵ But in the case of relocation, all factors influencing a culture are subjected to an abrupt transformation. In any case, it is important to work toward a long-range improvement of health conditions. On the one

3 FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 34.

4 Ibid., p. 36 and ABDALLA, "The Choice of Khashm al-Girba Area for the Resettlement of the Halfawis," p. 56.

5 SPLETT, *Bedürfnis und Bedürfnisbefriedigung als Motivation im Prozess des Kulturwandels*, p. 74.

hand, good medical supplies are needed for this, and, on the other hand, practices and traditions within a culture which support health and well-being need to be emphasized. Cultural aspects that impair them need to be called into attention. Especially in a case such as resettlement, where drastic cultural changes are anticipated, this change should be influenced in a positive way

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is a comparison of Nubian culture before the High Dam was built and of the situation and its development after relocation. Its aim is to verify to what extent the assumption of the government – that through relocation into “civilization,” with all its medical facilities, the health conditions of the entire Nubian society would improve – was legitimate. For this purpose, the paper focuses on health conditions before and after the relocation, noting areas of improvement and deterioration in the state of Nubian women's health. Also, this paper explores how far this could have been foreseen and to what extent the retention of the culture should have been supported for the good of Nubian women's health due to transculturation.

As this article is an excerpt from an extensive paper,⁶ some topics were selected and will serve this task as an example.

The Nubian Relocation 1963/1964

The construction of the Aswan High Dam started in 1960. Rebuilding the villages on higher terrain was impossible, as all cultivable land would disappear and the water level would vary greatly. Instead the governments planned a relocation of over 100,000 people in Egypt and Sudan. Affected were most of the Nubian villages in Egypt and Sudan. The water was dammed for 105 miles, and flooded the Wadi Halfa district.⁷

In both countries, benefits of the resettlement were extolled. The Egyptian president said in his speech to the Nubians in 1960: “The benefits which the Nubian people will enjoy are very great. They will be brought together on a proper basis to build a strong and healthy community.”⁸

In Sudan the government promised a strong improvement of living standards through increasing productivity, leading to a higher income and better infrastructure, with improved education and access to medical treatment. The chairman of the relocation commis-

6 PAESLER, *Wandel der nubischen Kultur im Hinblick auf die Gesundheit der nubischen Frau*.

7 FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 1.

8 Quoted from FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 36.

sion explained: "Our major aim is resettlement of a healthy society and doubling the income of the family within five years."⁹

However, both countries hoped for additional economic profit out of the relocation besides the advantages of the dam lake. The Egyptian government planned to expand agriculture, especially the cultivation of sugar cane, and located the area for New Nubia with this expectation in mind.¹⁰ The Sudanese government was convinced that the Khashim el Girba Scheme, the new living environment for the Sudanese Nubians, would bring economic progress for the whole country.¹¹ It expected New Nubia to become a main earner of foreign currency on the exchange market through extensive agriculture and the cultivation of cotton and peanuts while making the country more independent of imported merchandise through cultivation of sugar cane and wheat.¹² In both cases it becomes apparent that the needs of the Nubians were not primary, but economic profit was the driving factor in deciding which region would be suitable for relocation. The governments of both countries created committees that were responsible for the planning and execution of the relocation, but no Nubian representatives were part of them, although there were Nubian delegations advising these committees.¹³ Especially in Sudan it is clearly documented that relocation would not have taken place in this area if there had been a Nubian influence in the decision. Khashim el Girba has had a bad reputation for the highest crime rates in the country, whereas crime was almost non-existent in Wadi Halfa.¹⁴ The Nubians feared for their safety in this multi-cultural area, and also feared the drastic change of climate. What they were facing was a transition from absolute dryness to a rainy climate where malaria was widespread. Resettlement to this area broke the prime minister of Sudan's promise to only relocate the Nubians with their agreement.

Concepts of Illness and Health in Nubian Understanding

The Nubians understand illness as something that causes physical suffering. In my conversations and interviews with Nubians it became apparent that a disease without pain or feeling uncomfortable, as for example high blood pressure or diabetes, is not often acknowl-

9 Quoted from KRONENBERG & KRONENBERG, "Nubische Werte und der Wiederaufbau von Wadi Halfa," p. 21.

10 POESCHKE, *Nubians in Egypt and Sudan*, p. 37. The term "Nubia" in this paper does not describe a historical realm but the living area of the Nubians. The terms Old Nubia and New Nubia help define this living area as before or after resettlement.

11 KRONENBERG & KRONENBERG, "Nubische Werte und der Wiederaufbau von Wadi Halfa," p. 23.

12 POESCHKE, *Nubians in Egypt and Sudan*, p. 37.

13 FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, pp. 3-4; FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 35.

14 FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 7.

edged to be an illness. Indeed, they now know about these diseases and their treatments through modern medicine, but still the idea lingers that these are not real illnesses. Only cancer was mentioned as an exception by my dialogue partners when I asked them if there are diseases without pain. Most answered: "No, there is nothing like this." Some added: "The only thing is cancer. You don't feel it. But this is a disease." Only a few considered unnoticeable bodily conditions to be an illness. Still many talked to me about their suffering from diabetes which seems to be a paradox. The fact that many Nubians do not take this disease seriously is demonstrated by the way many diabetics consume many spoons of sugar in their tea although they know the danger.

As the Nubians are Muslims, their understanding of illness, health and healing is affected by Islam. In the Koran references concerning medical questions are rare. It attests to God being the creator (Sura 3:190) who made man (Sura 4:1) and who forms men in the wombs however he wills (Sura 3:6). When doing so, he forms them sighted or hearing (Sura 67:23) or blind and deaf (Sura 6:46). And it is not possible for one to die except by permission of Allah at a decree determined (Sura 3:145). The Koran only broaches the issue of suffering and hardship of illness marginally. But in general the Koran itself is counted as the best cure.¹⁵

For a Muslim a central aspect of handling illness, suffering, and death is the idea of predetermination through the will of God. At the same time it is not easy to define the proportion of personal responsibility and predetermination through the will of God. Certainly man is not absolved from his duty to act through the predetermination of God but he cannot change anything when his time has come (Sura 7:36). Suffering has different functions in the Koran. It might be a test that brings blessing to the tested when passing it (Sura 2:155-156) or a punishment for disobedience to God's warnings (Sura 7:77-78). Indeed Sura 4:79 says: "What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil is from yourself." But in Sura 6:17 it is written: "And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him. And if He touches you with good - then He is over all things competent."¹⁶ Here, both good and hardship are imputed to God and in the end the right reaction to it is to submit to the will of God.

This belief system was also often adopted by the Nubians. Thus it was common in the time before relocation to accept the condition of illness without putting any effort into receiving healing on the grounds that it is the will of God.¹⁷ Bühler reported from Dakke:

¹⁵ AL-AZHARI & AL-AQDA, *Ath.Thib an-Nabaui*, p. 137.

¹⁶ The Koranic translation used here is the Sahih International.

¹⁷ HERZFELD, "...unter Mohammedanern," p. 143.

"The Egyptian eye disease is a plague. Almost everybody here has to go through it. Mothers are hardly troubled when the children are sitting around for days with swollen, ulcerous eyes. 'By Allah's will' everyone needs to undergo it."¹⁸

Nubians distinguish between pathogens coming from the outside and those which arise inside the body itself. The idea that illnesses are caused through the "evil eye," magic or river spirits was widespread before relocation. The idea of the "evil eye" causing illness persists today and continues to have an impact on the Nubian woman's everyday life. When they lived beside the river, Nubians believed river spirits caused illness and infertility, which continues to be one of the worst fates for a woman. Now however, river spirits are irrelevant. Another important unseen being was the *qarīna*. Nubians believed every person to have a double from birth on, the *qarīna*. When there was disunity with it, it became an enemy and would cause the death of a child during delivery, for instance.¹⁹ These days, through modern medicine, it is known that bacteria and viruses can also be pathogens.

A pathogen that causes an illness from inside the body is mainly seen as a consequence of infringing a taboo. The concept *mušahara*²⁰ clarifies that disregarding certain rules or taboos endangers the health of oneself or others.

From the Nubian point of view, physical illnesses can be treated by folk medicine or drugs from clinics. But psychological illnesses need a complex combination of diagnoses and treatments that are identified and defined by ceremonies. With a psychological problem a Nubian would seldom go to a doctor.²¹ Before resettlement, when doctors were hard to reach and the distrust towards them was bigger than it is today, herbs and other natural resources served as cures or a ceremony or a ritual were performed.²² Fernea describes that a bad cough was treated with cumin tea, *karkade*, and date honey, the head was wrapped, newspaper was laid on the breast, cupping was done and parts of the Koran were copied.²³

E. Herzfeld, a doctor who worked in Aswan and Nubia from 1926 to 1966, reported on a neighborhood boy who had a fever for weeks because of an abscess on his arm, but she had to wait for another ten

18 BÜHLER, "Meine Freunde die Nubier," p. 10; quotes that are originally German are translated by myself.

19 HERZFELD, "Brief aus Oberägypten," *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* 27, p. 373.

20 *Mušahara* in its complexity is explained by Kennedy. It is concerned mainly with taboos or rituals that protect a person from evil river spirits which threaten fertility and life during a phase of life in which one is sacredly vulnerable, such as birth, circumcision, marriage or death. Through not paying attention to certain rules or taboos, either one's own or other people's health is endangered. KENNEDY, *Nubian Ceremonial Life*, pp. 127ff.

21 FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 86.

22 FERNEA & FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 52.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 102ff.

days after first seeing the sick boy until she was allowed to open the abscess and give medicine. Before this, the women present had tried to cure him with glowing nails and amulets.²⁴ She writes that nobody ever came to her without first seeking healing in incantations, amulets, pilgrimage to tombs of holy sheikhs, burning of aching body parts, smearing dung on wounds and inserting strange liquids into the eyes.²⁵ Fernea too documents burning and cupping as methods of cure.²⁶ At the same time Herzfeld describes the impact of western medicine on the people who have already put their trust in it. She writes: "Often sick people come with a lot of X-rays who have been seeking healing by many doctors. But many times a simple prescription for diet or the discontinuation of the many nonsensical drugs would help."²⁷ "Many infants and toddlers are brought to us, often they are just skin and bones, due to persistent diarrhea or where nutrition is totally insufficient. [...] When the mothers then ask for medication and one explains to them that far much more important is the right nutrition for the children they often smirk in an almost pitiful way and one knows everything will remain unaffected."²⁸

Here a problem of modern medicine becomes obvious. Drugs are not only taken the wrong way but also are turned to as a kind of miracle cure which helps against everything. Once this attitude towards drugs has been established it becomes very difficult to communicate that certain behavior patterns cannot be counterbalanced through medicine. While the Nubians opened themselves to new medical concepts, they kept certain social structures. Herzfeld wrote that the whole village accompanied a sick person to hospital and 5–10 people joined for every examination.²⁹ Today as in the past the sick person is always attended by many relatives and through this is embedded in a social network of people who care for him.³⁰

Illnesses caused by spirits in the Nubian belief system could only be helped by rituals. Thus for example when the *qarīna* was displeased, a donkey's foot was hung up in a woman's house or children were tattooed on the tip of the nose or the inside of the leg. Mothers took the first meconium of their child and drew a rider on the wall for a boy and a bride for a girl as protection and a sign of hope.³¹

24 HERZFELD, "Koschtamne, 12.–30. Oktober 1927," p. 158.

25 HERZFELD, *Als Ärztin am Nil*, 1st ed., p. 8.

26 FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 52.

27 HERZFELD, "...unter Mohammedanern," p. 143.

28 HERZFELD, "Assuan, 30. November 1926," p. 12.

29 HERZFELD, "...unter Mohammedanern," p. 135.

30 Jennings writes about networks among Nubian women. Her explanations are not considered in this context as she reports about women in West Aswan which have not been relocated.

Yet it is to be mentioned that according to her surveys there is a strong cohesion among Nubian women which leads to a large social backup. Neighbors and relatives help each other particularly in times of hardship and illness. JENNINGS, *The Nubians of West Aswan*, 1995.

31 HERZFELD, "Brief aus Oberägypten," *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* 27, p. 373.

Today many Nubians go to see a doctor when they do not feel well, but there are still certain situations, infertility for example, where only a ritual or a ceremony can help. Besides this there are still illnesses that can be cured by homespun remedies from teas of various kinds. Amulets may help or a little cut in the leg or on the temple until some blood flows. Cupping and burning is still considered a cure today. I have seen legs and faces several times in different parts of Nubia that show scars from these forms of treatment and the people were convinced of their effectiveness. Saeed reports from Khashm el Girba of cutting the leg when having stomach problems.³²

It seems that a medically diagnosed disease like diabetes is not acknowledged as illness, at least until physical discomfort appears. Bodily suffering is perceived as illness in the sense of "impaired by a pathogen of any kind." This means it can be caused by bacteria or viruses but also by a curse which has a negative effect on the body. Both need treatment. Stigmatization as a "sick person" had great consequences, especially for women. Herzfeld wrote:

The terms *sick woman* and *poor* and *disenfranchised woman* are absolutely synonymous. No Muslim man thinks of keeping a woman that is not fully able to work or has noticeable suffering. [...] So the women are not only worn out by their illnesses but also by the fear of repudiation.³³

Geiser indicates that by the 1960 census in Egyptian Nubia over 40% of the women were divorced or widowed and this condition resulted in a multitude of problems.³⁴ Illness and infertility were the main reasons for divorce.³⁵

It is interesting to see how resettlement left its mark on the Nubian's concept of illness. In research in Egyptian New Nubia, the people were asked which new illnesses appeared and which old ones disappeared. The informants answered that although health access had increased they were much healthier in their old home and became increasingly ill in their new living environment. According to them, old illnesses did not disappear, but instead new ones were added to it, e.g., heart attack, hypertension, diabetes, and psychological problems. "Old Nubia is 'health' while New Nubia is 'illness,'" said one informant.³⁶ This dichotomy is equally sensed by the Nubians in Khashm el Girba as evidenced by respondents in Saeed's interviews.³⁷ Yet this form of defining a pathogen equates

32 SAEED, *The Changing role of Nubian Women in Khashm El-Girba*, p. 82.

33 Herzfeld, "Assuan, Oktober 1929," p. 187.

34 GEISER, *The Egyptian Nubian*, pp. 41ff.

35 HERZFELD, "Brief aus Oberägypten," *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung*, p. 372.

36 Quoted from FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 87.

37 SAEED, *The Changing Role of Nubian Women in Khashm El-Girba*, 1993.

with hopelessness since the old home is immersed in the floods beyond recall and the new living environment has become the only remaining home. If one now assumes that this new home causes illness the question is how one can then achieve health.

The "Evil Eye" – One of the Most Frequent Pathogens

The "evil eye" will be looked at closely, as it is a crucial concept of illness and plays a large role in the lives of the Nubians. Grauer writes that "Nubian women feel pursued by the evil eye all their life; they ascribe illness and misfortune to its might and try to avert it in many different ways."³⁸ The seriousness of this threat can also be seen through the statement of Kriss and Kriss-Heinrich that by widespread opinion in the Middle East two-thirds of all people die because of the "evil eye."³⁹

The Nubian's fear of the "evil eye" becomes obvious in manifold ways, e.g., a blue bead hung up near a sick child to protect it⁴⁰ or little twin boys dressed in girl's clothes and draped with amulets.⁴¹ Scorpions embroidered from beads or small leather bags with Koran verses were very popular as well.⁴² Herzog collects descriptions of different authors about protection from the "evil eye" and reports that midwives used to hang a Dinar on the newborn's forehead or a nose ring around their neck. Children were left dirty, uncombed and greasy purposely in the belief that ugliness would avert the "evil eye." Mothers used to sew a cross to the children's clothes or to draw a cross on the wall with a baby's first bowel movement.⁴³ Nubian women told me that if a nursing mother is disturbed and one sees her milk or her breast it might be that the milk cannot withstand the "evil eye," sours and harms the child.

Müller states that children's uncleanness was a major health problem in Old Nubia because of eye diseases such as glaucoma, which brings about loss of sight in a short time, and trachoma, which leads to severe eye conditions. He describes how common it was to leave infants' faces covered with flies because of the belief

38 GRAUER, *Die Architektur und Wandmalerei der Nubier*, p. 76.

39 KRISS & KRISS-HEINRICH, *Volks Glaube im Bereich des Islam*, p. 17.

40 FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 103; HERZFELD, "...unter Mohammedanern," p. 132.

41 FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 58; it is conceivable that here the evil eye is associated especially with envy as sons were desired more than daughters. Due to the deception through the girl's dresses the parents did not await admiration for their sons but pity for their daughters. Saeed quotes a woman from Khashim al Girba: "for a boy people say [...] 'congratulation on having the knight', but for a girl people say [...] 'hope she will be one of those who are well-behaving'." This indicates how the birth of a boy adds to the family's pride and how the birth of a girl adds to the family's worries and anxiety." SAEED, *The Changing role of Nubian Women in Khashim El-Girba*, p. 64.

42 HERZFELD, "...unter Mohammedanern," p. 132.

43 HERZOG, *Die Nubier*, p. 99; MASSENBAACH, *Nubien unter dem Kreuz*, p. 74.

that this would disempower the “evil eye.” In consequence, it was almost impossible to establish healthy development and effectively combat eye diseases.⁴⁴

Very interesting is Herzfeld’s description of two girls who protected themselves from the “evil eye” with lots of jewelry. An eleven-year-old girl wore a big heart from green-black stone on a silver necklace, the hand of Fatima from green plastic and two little dried feet of a chameleon. The other young woman wore a lot of gold necklaces and among them a little golden hand with a blue bead, blue being the color against the “evil eye.”⁴⁵ It is astonishing that such a treasure of jewelry, gold and silver was worn as defense against the evil eye since it is closely connected to another person’s envy and it must be assumed that such a lot of jewelry would provoke envy. However, one can suspect that women could wear it because additional elements were included that would turn away another woman’s envy. At the same time a general protection against the “evil eye” was guaranteed.

Reproductive Health Development

The ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) stated in 1994 in its “Programme of Action” that “Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes.”⁴⁶

In the MENA region,⁴⁷ health conditions have improved clearly over the last four decades. Still, in a survey performed in 1998 in rural Lower Egypt, 509 married women were examined and it appeared that most of them suffered from gynecological problems.⁴⁸ Only 3% of the women had no afflictions related to reproductive health and about 30% suffered from four or more problems in this area at the same time. The 462 women who had been pregnant had had 249 miscarriages, 41 stillbirths, and 497 child deaths.⁴⁹ These numbers show

44 MÜLLER, *Grundzüge des christlich-islamischen Ägypten*, p. 254.

45 HERZFELD, “Ein letzter Besuch in Nubien,” p. 13.

46 UNITED NATIONS, “Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,” §7.2.

47 Countries belonging to this region are Egypt, Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Yemen, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank, and Gaza. Although the area surveyed here does not completely belong to this region, data about numbers, facts and health problems are taken into consideration as there are no such surveys on Nubian women specifically and at least the Egyptian Nubians geographically belong to the MENA-region.

48 KHATTAB, YOUNIS & ZURAYK, *Women, Reproduction, and Health in Rural Egypt*, p. 2.

49 Ibid., pp. 40ff; 44% had vaginal infections, over 50% suffered from uterus prolapse, 14% were found to have a urinary tract infection, and 63% were diagnosed as being anemic. 18% showed hypertension and 1% had syphilis.

how many problems there are in the field of reproductive health, although medical facilities are generally available. That these are not made use of is partly due to financial issues.⁵⁰ Other reasons are lack of education that leads to an absence of knowledge about health topics. Moreover, women in this region tend to downplay their health problems as they have to take care of the household or because they feel ashamed to speak about gynecological complaints, which usually lead to stigmatization. It was determined that "they also tend to perceive discharge and pelvic discomfort as part of their nature and lot in life."⁵¹

There is no study on the concrete reproductive health situation of Nubian women. Here there is a need for a detailed survey which would give information about which diseases women suffer from, how many are affected, what the reasons are and why medical care is not used or cannot help.

I start from the premise that the health problems reported from the region to a large extent also apply to Nubians. Herzfeld wrote around 1940 that just before the dam was heightened the conditions in the field of women's diseases and obstetrics were very bad. She says:

Women with their bleedings are almost always brought in too late and if in addition to fever, amebiasis is also often present, which complicates the situation and the hemoglobin sinks down to 25% and below, this means that anesthesia and an operation would become a life-threatening procedure. Childbed fever occurs alarmingly often.⁵²

A year before, she had described how many of the women were pale, haggard, and weak, with severe heart dysfunctions because of anemia, with snow white mucous membranes as one finds them in the decline of tuberculosis.⁵³ Fernea reports from the time before the High Dam around 1960 that many women were suffering from abdominal pain and often died during delivery.⁵⁴

In an interview with a Sudanese gynecologist in Dongola I was told that especially among Nubians in comparison to other Sudanese women many show a remarkable amount of gynecological problems. Particularly a prolapsed uterus occurs strikingly often.⁵⁵

There are many reasons for problems in the field of reproductive health which are partly mutually dependent. Medical risk factors

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵² HERZFELD, *Als Ärztin am Nil*, 2nd edn., p. 11.

⁵³ HERZFELD, *Missionsärztin in Nubien*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, pp. 11–12.

⁵⁵ Interview with Dr. Usam Jakub 2007.

such as malnutrition or infections affect the general health condition of a woman, which correlates with her reproductive health. General health conditions are also influenced by behavior patterns during delivery, the usage of medical facilities or health-conscious behavior. But these behavior patterns in turn are dependent on the woman's personal background including her education, if she is from an urban or a rural area, what her housing situation is, etcetera.⁵⁶ In other words there are many aspects of everyday life that have an effect on reproductive health. Only a few of them will be considered in respect to Nubian women in the following.

Delivery and Circumcision

Deliveries in Old Nubia took place under the care of the traditional midwife and of the women of the village. A doctor was normally only called for a delivery when it was "hopelessly protracted."⁵⁷ Because good obstetrics were not practiced, many women died by reason of complications caused by circumcision or unclean work by the midwives.⁵⁸ In addition, attending women had the right to examine the delivering woman gynecologically. This means unwashed hands were inserted into the woman. The midwife also made no attempt to protect the perineum.⁵⁹ After delivery, women with severe perineal lacerations had their legs bound together tightly for several weeks in hopes that the wounds would heal. Often, lacerations were very severe as a result of circumcision and infibulation, and it was hoped in that period that wounds would heal through this method.⁶⁰

Even now, most Nubian women are circumcised. Before resettlement, circumcision of girls was performed between the ages of three and nine. Herzog recounted that north of Wadi Halfa the clitoris and the labia minora were removed, while south of Wadi Halfa the labia majora were also removed, which is called the Sudanese or pharaonic circumcision. After cutting the aforementioned parts, the vagina was sewn up except for a little opening (infibulation), and the legs were bound together as described after delivery. El Guindi describes that before the legs were bound together, the midwife smeared egg yolk over the wound and laid henna leaves on top.⁶¹ The adhesion was only opened on the wedding day and was partly sewed up again when the husband was gone for a longer time in order to be diffibulated at his homecoming.⁶² Fernea states that

56 KHATTAB, YOUNIS & ZURAYK, *Women, Reproduction, and Health in Rural Egypt*, pp. 10–11.

57 HERZFELD, "Brief aus Oberägypten," *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* 28, p. 368.

58 FRÖHLICH, "Nubian Social Customs," p. 411.

59 HERZFELD, "Brief aus Oberägypten," *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* 28, p. 369.

60 HERZFELD, *Missionsärztin in Nubien*, p. 8.

61 EL GUINDI, "Had this been your face, would you leave it as is," p. 43.

62 HERZOG, *Die Nubier*, p. 100.

in Erd-Moz around 1960 only the clitoridectomy was performed because the pharaonic circumcision was forbidden by the government. The men explained that circumcision is necessary because it is good for the emotional and physical health of women and calms their sexual desires, whereby it becomes easier for them to be faithful to their husbands when they are gone because of labor migration. The women said circumcision makes them healthier and more feminine – that is to say, a real woman.⁶³ Kennedy writes: “there is a belief that without circumcision a degree of completeness of [...] womanhood is missing.”⁶⁴

According to a study performed by Hussein in Egyptian New Nubia right after resettlement, only Kenuz women underwent pharaonic circumcision. Among Fadja and Alaqat women the labia majora was not removed. Only a few of the surveyed women considered circumcision to be religiously required but explained it to be hygienic and aesthetic. Furthermore they said “without the operation the sex organs are disgusting to the husband by sight and touch.”⁶⁵ El Guindi reports of a Kenuz woman saying: “circumcision makes a woman nice and tight. The man finds great pleasure in tight women.”⁶⁶ Yet she also states that among the Kenuz a shift from the pharaonic form of circumcision to a more moderate form had started taking place by the end of the 1950s or the beginning of the 1960s, right before resettlement. “Midwives said they supported this change because they had found infibulations to be a cause of complications when brides were deflowered and babies were delivered.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless this shift did not seem to have prevailed.

In Northern Sudan today 90% of the women are circumcised, and 64% have the pharaonic circumcision. In 1979 the prevalence of this form of circumcision was still 97 to 100%. The slight percentage downward movement is thought to be a result of better education.⁶⁸ Sudanese Nubian women hold on to traditional circumcision even after resettlement till today.⁶⁹ Yet it is striking that this number is so high since pharaonic circumcision was forbidden by law in Sudan 1946.⁷⁰ According to El Dareer's study in Northern Sudan both women and men indicated religion and tradition as the most common reasons for circumcision, but indicated cleanliness and purity as well.⁷¹ Additionally, many proceeded on the assumption that the operation leads to better general health, and functions as a preven-

63 FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 54.

64 KENNEDY, “Circumcision and Excision in Egyptian Nubia,” p. 181.

65 HUSSEIN, *Anthropology of the Egyptian Nubian Women*, p. 57.

66 EL GUINDI, “Had this been your face, would you leave it as is,” p. 32.

67 Ibid., p. 41.

68 EULER, *Genitale Verstümmelung von Mädchen und Frauen*, pp. 10–11.

69 SAEED, *The Changing Role of Nubian Women in Khashm El-Girba*, p. 42.

70 GORDON, “Female Circumcision and Genital Operations in Egypt and the Sudan,” p. 5.

71 EL DAREER, *Woman, Why Do You Weep?* pp. 67, 73.

tive measure against stillbirth.⁷² Traditional midwives stated consistently that they saw a worm hatching out of the girls during circumcision, which is seen to be a sign of illness which is healed through the operation.⁷³

In Egypt the circumcision rate is around 90% as well, but there clitoridectomy is generally conducted.⁷⁴ However, this is not true for the Nubians. Today Egyptian Nubian women mostly have pharaonic circumcision.⁷⁵ The Egyptian government passed a law in 2008 which forbids female circumcision. However it also says that it may still be conducted when there is a "medical need" for it; therefore the question arises as to how a medical need is defined. After all, the population's general idea is that circumcision is important for the well-being of a woman.

This operation is a rite of passage performed before puberty and with that the physical coming of age which symbolizes a social transition from being a child to being an adult. Gordon writes: "Although a circumcised girl may still be a child biologically, her status becomes that of a woman after her operation. She is no longer permitted to play outside or to socialize with boys her age; in some areas even school is forbidden, as she begins the task of waiting for a husband."⁷⁶

As a woman she now must conform to a certain code of conduct that emphasizes her honor and modesty. Her behavior from now on is especially watched with respect to her sexual purity, as honor is the collective property of a family. If a single member of this family incurs dishonor on himself he brings shame on the whole family. This means that it is the duty of every man to pay attention to the fact that no family member becomes guilty of a deed that would affect all. Since Nubian men were absent from their families, they supported circumcision for their female family members. "An important object of the prevalent practice of clitoridectomy was the preservation of premarital chastity. [...] males were, by convention, required to assume a protective and paternal attitude toward women, thus making heterosexual misconduct less likely."⁷⁷

The older women were also concerned with the purity of their daughters and granddaughters. With respect to western women and their behaviour, the women of Erd-Moz said to Fernea: "And then

72 GORDON, "Female Circumcision and Genital Operations in Egypt and the Sudan," p. 9.

73 EL DAREER, *Woman, Why Do You Weep?* p. 9.

74 ISMAIL & MAKKI, *Frauen im Sudan*, p. 34.

75 GORDON, "Female Circumcision and Genital Operations in Egypt and the Sudan," p. 5; This was confirmed to me by the former director of the evangelical hospital in Aswan in December 2007.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

77 GEISER, *The Egyptian Nubian*, p. 42.

they want to stop circumcising the girls [...] Can't they see that circumcision is the only way we can help our girls behave themselves?"⁷⁸

This fear is likely to have increased through resettlement and the given proximity to strange men. Thus, it is not surprising that Nubians were practicing the more moderate way of circumcision before resettlement⁷⁹ yet after resettlement implemented pharaonic circumcision, or removing the labia minora. The Nubians always wanted their women to have the best protection possible. But as total seclusion of women was not viable in practice, circumcision gained in importance in the new villages. Gordon says that "genital operations, with the physical and symbolic barriers that they present, serve as a substitute for a more complete seclusion of women."⁸⁰ The idea is that the broader the circumcision conducted, the "safer" the woman. As pharaonic circumcision only leaves a little vaginal opening it is necessary to open the vulva before a woman's first sexual intercourse and before every delivery. After delivery the woman is sutured again.⁸¹ This is not only a symbolic measure. The pharaonic circumcision is the guarantor that a girl will not have sexual intercourse before marriage; it stands sentinel over her sexuality.⁸² Kennedy writes that "the Nubians argue that the only way to blunt the inherent sexual wildness of girls and to preserve their chastity is through this means."⁸³

In the meantime there is a certain enlightenment about the consequences of circumcision, which include long-term severe complications from physical traumas to psychological problems. These include chronic infections of the uterus and the vagina, cysts, problems when urinating, painful menstruations, and complications during intercourse and deliveries.⁸⁴ Still, as surveyed by El Dareer, pain in the genital area was mainly ascribed to the evil eye and was treated with amulets and by magic formulas and a bath in the Nile.⁸⁵

Often it is the mothers and grandmothers who insist on circumcising their daughters and granddaughters. Boddy describes that in the end the goal is not to preserve the girls' sexuality but to increase the perceived value of their womanhood. "In this society women do not achieve social recognition by becoming like men, but becom-

78 FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 114.

79 Kennedy too reports about this development in 1970, although he mainly refers to a village that had not been resettled in 1963/64. KENNEDY, "Circumcision and Excision in Egyptian Nubia," p. 186.

80 GORDON, "Female Circumcision and Genital Operations in Egypt and the Sudan," p. 10.

81 ISMAIL & MAKKI, *Frauen im Sudan*, p. 35.

82 BODDY, "Womb as Oasis," p. 686.

83 KENNEDY, "Circumcision and Excision in Egyptian Nubia," p. 181.

84 ISMAIL & MAKKI, *Frauen im Sudan*, pp. 35–36.

85 EL DAREER, *Woman, Why Do You Weep?* p. 33.

ing less like men physically, sexually, and socially.”⁸⁶ While the circumcision of boys reveals the male organs, the organs of a girl are covered; she becomes “veiled.”⁸⁷ Moreover it is stated by Kennedy that “the operation is also believed magically to promote fertility.”⁸⁸ As infertility is so far-reaching for a woman this point is very important. Reproduction is held in safe custody through circumcision. Only through marriage does the husband gain access to the fertility of his wife and she obtains the means to activate it.⁸⁹

It can be judged positively that deliveries in Egypt now take place in hospitals and clinics, and so qualified staff can react to complications due to circumcision, and women experience better hygienic conditions.

Health-Conscious Behavior

Health-conscious behavior is an important factor that influences general health and also the reproductive health of a woman. Important factors influencing reproductive health are nutrition, health-care, hygiene and the workload of a woman, especially with respect to heavy physical labor. These are even more important in case of pregnancy.

In Old Nubia food was very limited. Access to groceries and clean water has improved a lot through resettlement, and some problems such as iron deficiency were stemmed. The water that people drank before resettlement was taken directly from the Nile and in general was not boiled.⁹⁰ Many pathogens were ingested from the water and passed on, and so amebiasis and ancylostomiasis were widespread. The synergy of an imbalanced nutrition, of strong tea-consumption and of diarrhea caused by hookworms led to a severe anemia in many Nubians.⁹¹

Herzfeld writes in 1931 that she had not seen cancer among the many patients she had treated in four years⁹² but notes in 1957 in Aswan, just before relocation, the impact of a changing lifestyle and nutrition. The prevalence and incidence of especially breast, stomach, liver and lower abdominal cancer had increased strongly. She also observed goiters that arise through iodine deficiency. At the same time the willingness to undergo operations had increased. The typical diseases of civilization, diabetes mellitus and hypertension,

86 BODDY, “Womb as Oasis” p. 687; Also compare EL GUINDI, “Had this been your face, would you leave it as is?”

87 BODDY, “Womb as Oasis,” p. 688.

88 KENNEDY, “Circumcision and Excision in Egyptian Nubia,” p. 181.

89 BODDY, “Womb as Oasis,” p. 688.

90 HERZFELD, *Missionsärztin in Nubien*, p. 20.

91 HERZFELD, *Als Ärztin am Nil*, 1st edn., pp. 8–9.

92 HERZFELD, “Brief aus Oberägypten.” *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* 28, p. 368.

occurred more often, as well as liver and intestinal disorders.⁹³ After resettlement she writes that she now found a lot of dyspeptics and diabetics, even among young people, through overstraining of the carbohydrate and fat metabolism.⁹⁴

This new, modern lifestyle which includes fast food and junk food also had its influence on the Nubians. Hypertension and diabetes mellitus are now widespread. In 1979, Fahim quotes from informants in Egypt that old diseases have not disappeared, but new ones have joined them. They list new medical conditions such as heart diseases, diabetes and hypertension.⁹⁵ Obesity exasperates these diseases and at the same time all of these medical conditions increase the risk of gestational and natal problems, such as maternal and perinatal diseases as well as maternal death. Moreover obesity is a risk factor for breast and uterine cancer. "High obesity prevalence among women may be partially due to the fact that women tend to avoid physical exercise."⁹⁶ In earlier times Nubian women had a lot of physical exercise through their physical labor but after relocation a radical change took place.

The social and demographic structure of the Nubian area was one of mainly women, children and old people. Men migrated due to the bad job situation and left agriculture to the women. Farming could only be conducted with cattle, and for that reason cattle breeding was inextricably linked with it. Nubian women showed great concern for the animals and invested a lot of time in animal care.⁹⁷ Fieldwork as well as responsibility for the animals resulted in great physical effort. Another of women's duties was bringing water up from the Nile. Many villages in northern Nubia were built high up the rocks because of the dam of 1902, and it required a great physical effort to take the water from the Nile to the village.

Through the loss of women's responsibility for farming and bringing water but also through generally decreasing distances, better infrastructure, and other factors, women have much less exercise than in earlier times.

Since the Nubian villages are no longer isolated, but located in a *foreign environment*, Nubian men do not often allow their wives and daughters to work on the fields. They want to have them separated from the Egyptian men of the vicinity. Thus, when Nubian men themselves decide to migrate abroad, they employ *Saeedi* farmers to carry out the necessary agricultural work in order to "protect" the

93 HERZFELD, "...unter Mohammedanern," p. 143; BACHHUBER, *Dr. med. Elisabeth Herzfeld* (1890-1966), p. 69.

94 HERZFELD, *Das Kreuz am Rande der Wüste*, p. 19.

95 FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 87.

96 AOYAMA, *Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa*, p. 75.

97 FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 13.

female family members from “*getting into danger*,” as one Nubian migrant explained.⁹⁸

As in Egypt also in the New Halfa Scheme women lost the leading role they formerly had in agriculture. Poeschke writes:

It is often a long way from the houses to the fields. Since women are predominantly responsible for housework, they have only little time for other activities at their disposal. The daily walk to the fields alone, however, would take up a great deal of time and therefore women have to refrain from it. Another aspect is that Nubian men – as in the Kom Ombo area – distrust members of the other ethnic groups and for that reason try to prevent their wives and daughters from leaving the home villages to work in remote fields.⁹⁹

These reasons also become obvious in Saeed’s study. Conspicuously present is the development of new taboos triggered by the isolation. While women had previously run agriculture with success, Saeed now reports that husbands often forbid their wives to go on the fields out of fear that the woman might ruin the harvest through her presence especially during her menstruation.¹⁰⁰

A woman’s family responsibilities are a very important aspect of her decision-making regarding the possibility of seeking out a physician’s help. For her, in Old Nubia there were few chances to visit health facilities. Herzfeld confirms this. She writes that for many women a longer treatment was required. She often tried to convince women to come to her clinic in Koshtamne or the hospital in Aswan but realized it was very difficult for them to leave the children, the house and the animals alone for a longer time and also to get the permission of their husbands.¹⁰¹

After resettlement the workload became less for women. As women often were not allowed to leave the village to work on the fields, which were far away, and water pipes made it needless to fetch water, women’s work was significantly lightened. But on the other hand, male work migration continued and men were absent from the new villages as well, which left the responsibility of taking care of the family on the women’s shoulders. Additionally, their freedom of movement was restricted because they now lived in a housing situation with strange neighbors. Relatives did not always live in the same house or neighborhood as in the past, so traditional

98 POESCHKE, *Nubians in Egypt and Sudan*, p. 61.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

100 SAEED, *The Changing Role of Nubian Women in Khashm El-Girba*, p. 65; in the required behaviour of menstruating women Seligmann sees a fear of the evil eye in many different cultures. SELIGMANN, *Der Böse Blick und Verwandtes*, p. 94.

101 HERZFELD, *Missionsärztin in Nubien*, p. 22.

bilateral aid was restricted. So for some women even in New Nubia it remained difficult to make use of the new medical facilities.

The Nubians have always been known for their cleanliness and hygiene. They not only regularly made a thorough clean-up of their houses but also kept the streets neat and tidy. Garbage was picked up and collected at a place where it was burned. Also their clothes and the children were always clean.¹⁰² Only with respect to the ritual performed after delivery there were medical concerns. The mother and the newborn had their first bath on the fortieth day after delivery. It was the day in which the mother became ritually pure again. The government's physicians moved in on this custom early with varying degrees of success. Today it is not performed anymore¹⁰³ and to the present day Nubians in their new environment are also known for their cleanliness.

Change in Living Environment and Its Effect on Health Conditions

Nubian architecture was characteristic in that mud house construction created functional and aesthetic living spaces. Egyptian and Sudanese governments formulated the goal of raising the Nubian living standard through providing "modern" habitation. However, for residents, accommodation comprises much more than the pure constructive form. Indeed, good housing allows a social network to develop and strengthens cultural elements. "Traditional villages, sprawling, dirty, and overcrowded to such an extent that the outside observer sees little more than chaos, are often delicate and sensitive expressions of social organization. [...] However bad the physical housing itself may be, the villager derives some comfort and, indeed, some meaning from its pattern."¹⁰⁴

Sadly these things were not given much importance in planning the resettlement. Although the new houses were built in a more "modern" way, living conditions became worse in several areas because they did not serve the cultural elements that were lived through housing and because social networks were destroyed. Nor were aesthetics given an important role, even though it is known that people who live in ugly, boring or uncreative environments tend to barrenness and dejection. The Sudanese Nubians even saw their relocation as a "setback" from a social and cultural perspective despite being provided by "modern" and "progressive" houses.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² DAFALLA, *The Nubian Exodus*, p. 50; HERZFELD, *Als Ärztin am Nil*, 2nd edn., p. 3.

¹⁰³ VYCICHL, "Ägypten und Nubien," p. 24; HERZOG, *Die Nubier*, p. 98; SAEED, *The Changing Role of Nubian Women in Khashm El-Girba*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ POLK, "Foreword," p. x.

¹⁰⁵ FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 161.

Houses in Old Nubia were located along the waterfront of the Nile, grouped in villages of about one hundred people each. The villages were separated from each other by dunes and hills, and there were no streets or trains connecting one with the other. The only method of locomotion was the river. This led to the relative isolation of each village, and meant that their inhabitants were largely related to each other. The homesteads hosted extended families and tended to be situated far apart to provide space for an extension in the case of family enlargement, e.g., by marriage. Such a family house was equipped with a guest area, one or more inner courtyards, a bridal room, with cooking, storing, sleeping and living rooms together with an open, roofed loggia or an open-air work area with various stables for the animals.¹⁰⁶

In southern Nubia where the Nile washed up plenty of earth, houses were built from mudbricks or stone. A mixture of mud, sand and chaff was layered until the walls had a diameter of around sixteen inches to keep out the heat. In the Kenuz district this mixture was used as mortar for their stone walls. The wall was then plastered with a thin layer of clay and sand. The Nubians of the Mahas and the Arabic districts constructed their roofs by using palm stems, acacia wood beams, and braided palm branches in between. In the Kenuz area rooms had barrel-vaulted ceilings.¹⁰⁷

The main entrance faced the Nile and the entrance area was heavily decorated. Often there were side entrances as well. In the inner courtyard, which was private and only open to the family and close friends, household chores were carried out, free time was shared by sitting together, and on hot nights it served as a sleeping area. Moreover, sometimes vegetables were grown, animals housed and through the entering sunrays the family even had their "private piece of sky."¹⁰⁸ The whole house was constructed in a way that enabled the seclusion of the families' women.¹⁰⁹ The courtyard worked as a ventilation system the effect of which was noticeable in all rooms of the house. The living area was partially or totally open towards the inner courtyard, which promoted air circulation. Windows were not fitted due to the heat, but little slots directly under the roof also provided for air circulation. In this way the warm air from the room could rise and escape through the little openings of the dome while fresh air advected from the inner courtyard. The toilet was not located inside the living area. The residents went to the stables or into the desert, away from the house, to relieve themselves. In the Kenuz area and the Wadi al Arab houses were white-

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ EL-HAKIM, *Nubian Architecture*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 10.

washed and then children and women painted the walls from the inside and outside by using colorful natural colors.¹¹⁰ Additionally a wall-mounted bench (*mastaba*) was located on the exterior wall which helped the neighbors communicate in a socially accepted and informal way.¹¹¹

Living Under New Conditions in New Nubia

For the Egyptian Nubians the climate situation did not change as much as it did for the Sudanese Nubians. Despite relocation they remained in a hot arid climate, although without the amenities of the Nile, two to six miles away. There were no shade-providing palm trees anymore or the cool wind that came from the river. Instead the 553 villages which had before been located at a length of 220 miles were brought into an area of about 80 square miles (including all agricultural land) and condensed to a length of 30 miles.¹¹² Being close to upper Egyptians caused them to feel discomfort as they believed their women not to be safe anymore.¹¹³

In Sudan the Nubians were resettled to a region of subtropical climate with a rainy season in 25 new villages in a length of 20 miles. Proximity to the other ethnic groups of the area appeared threatening to Sudanese Nubians as well. The city of New Halfa was constructed to serve as an administrative center for the new living area.¹¹⁴

In both countries the new accommodations were built with one to four rooms and also had a small room that served as inner courtyard, a kitchen and a bathroom. By request of the Nubians, the new villages in Egypt received their old names and were arranged geographically largely in the same order as they had been in Old Nubia.¹¹⁵

Yet while Nubians used to live in extended families they were now split up. The houses were built for nuclear families only and after a stereotype, standardized in form and material.¹¹⁶ The goal was to find a way to accommodate many people by choosing straight running streets and to minimize costs through the construction of row houses which share adjoining walls.¹¹⁷

Through these governmental measures and architectural conditions, old neighborhoods and villages were physically and socially

110 EL-HAKIM, *Nubian Architecture*, pp. 18ff.

111 FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 60.

112 EL-HAKIM, *Nubian Architecture*, p. 51.

113 SPLETT, *Bedürfnis und Bedürfnisbefriedigung als Motivation im Prozess des Kulturwandels*, p. 173.

114 FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 9.

115 FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, pp. 55ff.

116 EL-HAKIM, *Nubian Architecture*, p. 9.

117 FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 59.

destroyed. The *mastaba* in front of the house is an example of the physical and social connection. While this bench was found in front of every house in Old Nubia, it was absent in the new villages. Already difficult social interactions were influenced negatively by this absence. Informal meetings became difficult, as it was unacceptable to sit on the floor because it was regarded as unclean, and because one did not want to be identified with a habit of Egyptian farmers.¹¹⁸

However, not only the village community suffered; especially staggering was the change in the extended family, which became even more obvious in Egypt. Through the division into nuclear families, relatives were scattered into different blocks¹¹⁹ and most old people of the society were separated from the nuclear family. They were assigned to the smaller houses, where they were expected to live by themselves. Thus they were excluded from participating in everyday life. This problem became even bigger when the government forbade the transfer and disposal of these new houses.

The houses which were constructed in Kom Ombo were built from quarystone and for heat protection ventilating-stones were laid on the reinforced concrete ceiling. But this construction proved to be a mistake. Instead of rejecting the heat the roof stored and led it into the house. The constant heating-up and cooling-down of the ceiling and the connected expansion and contraction induced the walls to tear which led to severe cracks in the houses. The consequence for the temperature in the house was extreme heat in summer and severe cold in winter. The construction of the toilets was also perceived as annoying. While it had never been inside the house, it was now built beside the guestroom. Often toilets were clogged or not even used at all.

As mentioned above, the aim was to minimize costs through this kind of architecture, but in the end it seems to have been a miscalculation. Nubian villages that had not been affected by resettlement and kept the old architecture prove that their traditional way of construction is much cheaper than the architecture of upper Egyptians. El-Hakim states that additionally in his opinion they look nicer, appear more spacious and act as cultural identifiers.¹²⁰

Consequences of the Altered Living Environment for Health Conditions

The loss of traditional Nubian houses brought about the loss of privacy, which resulted in psychological problems. In Old Nubia the distance between the homesteads and the high and thick outer wall

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

¹¹⁹ SPLETT, *Bedürfnis und Bedürfnisbefriedigung als Motivation im Prozess des Kulturwandels*, p. 173.

¹²⁰ EL-HAKIM, *Nubian Architecture*, pp. 38ff.

ensured that one did not have to have contact with people if one did not want to. Also, the interior walls were thick and guarded privacy within the house. Guests did not necessarily witness what was happening in the house because the guestroom was directly beside the main entrance.¹²¹

Resettlement for the Nubians meant a shift from a private living environment to one more public with a dense population and many strangers. Housing units in the new villages were small and crowded together, with thin walls lacking soundproofing. At the same time these were the walls of the neighbors to the left and the right and thus enclosure became impossible. The sense of being observed arose and led to feelings of insecurity, especially as the extended family had been separated. In Egypt houses were distributed according to the size of the nuclear family and living space decreased from 0.7 persons per room before resettlement to 1.7 persons per room in 1966. This situation worsened because of family growth after relocation and the return of many labor migrants.¹²²

In Sudan the living situation was even more difficult. Fahim writes: "Although the standards of the new houses are high under present Sudanese conditions, the settlers were unhappy with these houses which the government viewed as ideal."¹²³ The reason was that houses were not distributed according to the family size but according to the value of the old house. "Large families, whose old houses were estimated below 100 pounds received two-room houses and thus were unable to accommodate their members whose numbers ranged between seven and nine persons on the average. The addition of extra rooms was practically impossible."¹²⁴

Moreover, guestrooms were often absent, which meant that guests had to be invited into the private space of the family. As it brings shame to the hospitable Nubian not to offer a separate room to the guest, families left their own house and went to their neighbors or relatives.

Nubians were used to having windows facing the inner courtyard, which had no openings to the outside except the ventilation slots. But the new houses were equipped with windows facing the street, which enabled passersby to see inside the private area or at least to hear life inside the house. This rapidly made for the increase of rumors and brought tensions between the villagers.

A Nubian headmaster expressed himself about these changes with the following words: "In old Nubia life was truly natural, sim-

121 FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 58.

122 FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 84; FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, pp. 59-60.

123 FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 9.

124 Ibid.

ple, easygoing and particularly informal. These things have been changed a lot. One feels here that he lives in a whirlpool."¹²⁵ Fahim writes that this "whirlpool" feeling was widespread and added to the already growing tension and stress of relocation as well as the feeling of a lack of security. While Nubians felt very secure in their old native land and described it as "the land of security and peace,"¹²⁶ the number of crimes among young Nubians in Egypt as well as in Sudan had increased notably after resettlement. Raids and rapes now happened in their own villages among their own ethnic groups, which fueled fear and insecurity.¹²⁷

A phenomenon that now occurred particularly among women was a change in their psychological condition. Female Egyptian informants reported in conducted surveys that the frequency of psychological disorders and depression had increased in Nubian women. The reasons mentioned were, among others, the lack of privacy and the loss of security.¹²⁸ Due to the even greater changes for relocated Nubians in Sudan, one can assume that depression existed there as well. There is proof that women and children displayed psychological problems because of the shift in climate. Fahim writes in 1972: "The Medical Officer at Halfa Hospital informed me that large numbers of Nubians are still suffering from emotional disturbances as a result of lightning and rain."¹²⁹ In my opinion this problem can also be ascribed to architecture. A people that used to live in a region where it did not rain at all now had to live in houses with tin roofs¹³⁰ that boost the sound of rain, so that every falling raindrop appears threatening.

Beside the psychological drains that appeared because of the new architecture, numerous negative effects on physical health were also displayed. The considerable increase in population density meant that infectious diseases could spread easily. In the first years after resettlement in Egypt an increased prevalence of diarrhea, measles and encephalitis was detected. As a solution for the space problem the Nubians resorted to a horizontal and a vertical expansion. Those who could afford it built another floor on their house at ground level. But this was very risky because of the poor foundation and walls. Additionally, neighbors were not happy because again they felt a decrease of privacy. So the Nubians expanded horizontally wherever it was possible. The new houses were constructed to shelter farm animals, as the upper Egyptians used to do. For the Nubians this was absurd. Fernea reports of a woman saying before

125 FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 84.

126 Ibid., p. 87.

127 Ibid.; FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 19.

128 FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 87.

129 FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 9.

130 Ibid.

resettlement: "Have you seen any of the houses the government is building for us, madame? [...] there are only three small rooms and a court, isn't it? [...] And the animals are supposed to be in the same house with us. What a funny idea! Who thought of that?"¹³¹ So the people built stables for their animals wherever there was space. Fahim writes: "They also built barns [...] in the middle of the street [...]" During my 1975 visit to the area, I found some villages where streets were occupied by animal barns; as a result, animal waste and flies had become a health nuisance."¹³²

Moreover water used for agriculture in Kom Ombo had become a severe problem. Some villages have a slight slope towards the Nile and swamp-like conditions emerged in and around 20% of the villages, a biotope for mosquitoes. One reason was that latrines filled up very quickly and constant sewage disposal would have been needed. The outcome was a bad smell, seepage and waste water being disposed of in the streets. Through these different water puddles the risk for malaria and bilharziosis went up and because of all these deficiencies, Fahim says, the strong Nubian quality of cleanliness disappeared in many villages.¹³³ Today the water problems are solved and in comparison to other upper Egyptian villages, cleanliness can still be noticed. Yet I believe it has diminished in comparison to what is known about Old Nubia.

Drawings and decorations were very important in building a house. The meaning of arts for the psyche should not be underestimated. This was the women's task, and the aesthetic factor identified the inhabitants and protected them from the evil eye.¹³⁴ The evil eye was the reason for embellishments, especially around the main entrance. Walls were painted with hands or eyes and provided with decorative supplements as protection against the evil eye or scorpions. This also expressed the bond to the local village community and affiliation to Islam, and gave information about the inhabitants e.g. embellishments that proclaimed that one of the family members had done the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Old Nubia these embellishments were not only artistic expressions but also showed a bond to their own society and culture and protected the residents.

By contrast, houses in the new villages were poorly constructed and stood in one row, one house looking like the other, built with the same stones, without any decorations or identifying features. Many families in the New Halfa Scheme exchanged their wooden doors for

131 FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 114.

132 FAHIM, "Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt," p. 84.

133 Ibid., p. 85.

134 GRAUER, *Die Architektur und Wandmalerei der Nubier*, pp. 112ff.

colorful and embellished iron doors. These door designs had a socio-cultural meaning and defended against the evil eye.¹³⁵

Although the Egyptian government in the beginning prohibited modification of the houses, Nubians in Kom Ombo soon after their arrival started to remodel them.¹³⁶ Women especially took the initiative “to change the government house to Nubian homes.”¹³⁷ Exterior walls were heightened, windows blocked up, air slots which one could look through were displaced and benches were affixed to the front of the houses. Many families rendered and decorated their walls with traditional means and symbols and tiled the inside floor, built new walls and provided them with protective characters.¹³⁸ One Nubian said: “If we want to maintain our old customs, we must maintain our Nubian architecture.”¹³⁹ Yet many elements of traditional Nubian architecture could not be restored and Nubian culture thereby experienced a lasting change.

In many villages of the New Halfa Scheme Sudanese Nubians, in contrast to Egyptian Nubians, have not changed anything about their houses. Saeed reports that village number 18 in comparison to other villages stands out because house designs have been changed, and entrances and walls redesigned and colorfully painted. It is notable that these changes could only be found in a village whose residents have a good education and a better financial situation.¹⁴⁰

Vitamin D Deficiency and Obesity

Vitamin D deficiency in children and women and obesity are the main nutritional problems of the MENA region.¹⁴¹ It has not been determined if Nubians are affected similarly, but evidence of their lifestyle as well as descriptions of physical problems suggests that they are. It can be assumed that these problems only emerged after relocation and are related to the different living conditions.

Vitamin D (cholecalciferol) is necessary for forming bones and teeth, which to a large part are composed of phosphor and calcium. The incorporation of these minerals is assisted by vitamin D. Cholecalciferol can be taken with nutrition, but is built primarily by the cholesterol that is available in the skin, which is transformed to vitamin D by the ultraviolet radiation of the sun. Only 10–20% of a person's vitamin D demand is covered through nutrition. The

¹³⁵ FAHIM, *Nubian Resettlement in the Sudan*, p. 10.

¹³⁶ FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 63.

¹³⁷ FAHIM, “Community-Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt,” p. 84.

¹³⁸ FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, pp. 63–64. Armgard Goo-Grauer in a conversation hinted to me that the wallpaintings which were drawn after resettlement have now disappeared completely.

¹³⁹ FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁰ SAEED, *The Changing Role of Nubian Women in Khashm El-Girba*, p. 84.

¹⁴¹ AOYAMA, *Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa*, p. 70.

ramifications of a lack of vitamin D are weakening of the bones, which causes rickets in children and bone softening in adults. A symptom of rickets is the deformation of bones, especially those of the leg. Bone softening does not lead to deformation but causes dull pain and a risk for bone fractures. But beside these well proven consequences, surveys have showed that vitamin D also protects from heart attack, cancer, diabetes and multiple sclerosis and has a positive effect on the psyche.

Aoyama states that young women in the MENA region often reported pain in the bones and many showed bone fractures. Many Nubian women complained to me about pain in their bones as well. Aoyama writes that a lack of Vitamin D is caused by their life style and the behavior pattern of women, who never or seldom go outside and thus stay away from the sun. As an example she mentions life in dark houses and veiling.¹⁴²

This is also true for Nubian women today. In their native land the women were in the sun a lot for their daily tasks, while bringing water and caring for the animals, during field work, and in other activities. Because of the clothes they wore they were not totally blocked off from the sun. Head, face and neck, underarms, hands and feet partially up to the calves were uncovered by clothing, which allowed the skin exposure to the sun while working but also while sitting in the inner courtyard and on the benches in front of the houses. In some areas the women wore big white wrapping cloths when they left the house. In other areas they wore black, transparent *gargas* on top of printed cotton dresses and transparent veils on head and shoulders.¹⁴³

Through resettlement and new living conditions women were considerably less exposed to the sun. Because of overcrowding in the villages, a close coexistence with nonrelated people, increasing crime and a general feeling of insecurity, female movement was limited to the house and a few outdoor activities.¹⁴⁴ But in contrast to Old Nubia, these houses were not constructed to facilitate a life behind closed doors, especially because of the absence of the big inner courtyard that guaranteed privacy in the open air.

In addition, Islam has had a much wider influence on Nubian women. Although Nubians have nominally belonged to Islam for roughly 400 years, their belief system mingled orthodox Islam, popular Islam and non-Islamic elements.¹⁴⁵ Attention should be paid to the fact that women and men had different belief systems in Old

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁴³ MASSENBACH, *Mohrenland wird seine Hände ausstrecken zu Gott*, p. 12; FERNEA & WARNOCK FERNEA, *Nubian Ethnographies*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁴ FAHIM, *Egyptian Nubians*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁵ FAHIM, "Change in Religion in a Resettled Nubian Community," p. 166.

Nubia. While men had a much wider knowledge about Islam and its content due to better education, knowledge of the Arabic language and their labor migration, the women, Grauer writes, knew less: "Knowledge about Islam in the women's mindscape is confined to a *Fatiha* that is garbled to an unrecognizable state [...] and simplified articles of faith."¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, in their world of faith a multitude of spirits, the evil eye and many commandments and taboos of the popular faith played an important part.

Fahim reports that soon after resettlement a demand for purification of the Nubian religion arose and the importance of orthodox Islam for everyday life was stressed. He says: "The closer and more intensive contact between New Nubia and urban centers, where the trend toward Islamization has been highly developed, has succeeded in gaining more support for orthodox-oriented Nubian groups. Support is provided also by promoters of the development of the new Nubian communities. This process of Islamization, then, appears to be closely interrelated with modernization."¹⁴⁷

Moreover, the religion was propagandized to form a unified whole for the different Nubian and non-Nubian groups, and through this the integration of the Nubians into their new living environment was promoted on both sides.¹⁴⁸

This empowerment of Islam among the Nubians brought about a change in the women's clothing. More and more clothing of the Egyptian women, that is their black over-dress and veil, was adopted. In recent years also a veiling of the face and a covering of hands and feet found its way into Nubian wear. While I saw this form of veiling in only a few instances thirteen years ago, now a large number of women dress this way. I assume fashion changed not only due to the promotion of Islam but also due to life in an environment with strange neighbors. So women's life has not only changed to be a life in the house but situations in which women leave the house are now characterized by the desire to protect oneself from the looks of strangers. This means that the skin is not exposed to sunlight anymore. The consequence from a medical point of view is a lack of vitamin D. Whether this thesis is true for Nubians still needs to be ascertained, but evidence for this is given by the fact that many Nubians in Egypt now show a severe calcium deficiency. This was reported to me by the director of the evangelical hospital in Aswan who has been working in New Nubia for many years. This lack of calcium leads him to presume an incidence of vitamin D deficiency as well, as this helps the body absorb calcium.

¹⁴⁶ GRAUER, *Die Architektur und Wandmalerei der Nubier*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁷ FAHIM, "Change in Religion in a Resettled Nubian Community," p. 175.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

It is also notable that through life in the house and the resulting lack of exercise, a large number of women are found to be overweight.

Conclusion

Comparisons in different areas of life show that the authorities' expected improvement of Nubian health has been partially achieved. Health care has clearly improved due to the accessibility of numerous health centers. Many formerly common and sometimes severe illnesses can now easily be cured, and thus health in general is improved. A better education leads to a better understanding of the body and diseases. Through this, women are now better informed about different forms of therapy and the ways each one works, which is important for successful treatments. Access to fruits, vegetables and meat has improved a lot, which addresses previous deficiencies of vitamins. Through the facility of running water, hygiene was benefited, women were physically relieved, hookworms and bilharziosis were restricted and amebiasis could be controlled more. Concerning deliveries, medical facilities were a positive development through which mother and child have a higher life expectancy, lacerations can be prevented and infections can be avoided through better healthcare provider hygiene.

At the same time, through the new living environment and new lifestyle, new illnesses occurred which no one seemed to have expected nor the planning committees given thought to preventing. Through the offer of various new foods and incorporation into "civilization," diseases of civilization have now emerged. The high consumption of sugar and fat that has also been engendered by consumer goods finds expression in weight gain and obesity, high hypertension and diabetes. A lack of exercise contributes as well. In Khashimel Girba, malaria posed a new disease to the Nubians. The new living conditions had a strong effect on the psyche of women who suffered from feelings of unrest. Additionally the architecture reinforced the feeling of insecurity through lack of privacy and the perception that spirits could easily enter the unprotected. The efforts to maintain seclusion led to a lack of sunlight and thereby to a high risk of lack of vitamin D. With regard to female circumcision the feeling of threat which resulted in an emphasis on seclusion caused Nubian women to revert to the more extensive pharaonic form.

It becomes clear that new forms of diseases and health problems have occurred which could have been foreseen and partially prevented. Problems in the area of nutrition could particularly have

been expected. Nubians formerly always had to economize with their food and were never tempted to eat in a way that would have strained the body. But they lacked knowledge about the new food and its impact on the body. Nutrition programs for women should have been planned from the beginning to teach about balanced diet. In this way also an understanding could have grown about illnesses, such as diabetes, that cannot be felt immediately but are still diseases that have to be taken seriously.

Such an education program could potentially have counteracted seclusion and could have given the women a panel to speak about different topics, to stay socially involved and to influence society actively as they had been doing before. Moreover, old knowledge about herbs and traditional medicine could have been encouraged and conserved. This might have worked against the total reliance on modern medicine and the impulse to take drugs even for minor illnesses. Repeatedly I was told by physicians that a doctor is only considered a good physician if he prescribes a whole cocktail of different drugs that help immediately.¹⁴⁹ If they do not, they said, the patient would proceed to treatment from another doctor only few days later. The awareness that sometimes another lifestyle is needed and medicine cannot always help is often missing totally. This problem could also have been countered by a better understanding of the body.

Knowledge of the female body and its functions would have been important with regard to female circumcision. Creating true understanding that circumcision does not make girls and women pure and clean but brings along with it many complications, e.g. infections that have a negative effect on fertility, could have been promoted. Moreover, knowledge about body coherence in general serves families; for example knowledge of bodily functions reassures a woman who was not able to become pregnant in the first few months after marriage.¹⁵⁰

That the crowded and narrow living space would have multiple negative effects could have been foreseen as well as the women's feeling of fear in living conditions totally new for them. The same is true of the feelings of insecurity and of being a foreigner owing to architectural features. In addition, it would not have been a large extra effort and expense to affix a bench in front of the house. This would have had the advantage of strengthening social fabric

¹⁴⁹ Haddad describes the excessive use of medication, by the doctor as well as by the patients, as being generally widespread in the Arab world. Doctors prescribe medicine because patients demand it. Moreover, she states that mainly women are the consumers. HADDAD, "Women and Health in the Arab World," p. 95.

¹⁵⁰ Cases in which women are panicking because they are not pregnant after two months of marriage were described to me by the former director of the evangelical hospital in Aswan in December 2007.

in the villages, maybe decreasing seclusion, and helping women get enough sunlight for adequate vitamin D production. Generally, consideration should have been made for which elements of the former Nubian architecture could have been borrowed, and which construction elements in the new villages should have been omitted, as they did not support Nubian living perceptions, such as e.g. the big windows to the street. Hygiene problems and the prevalence of diseases could have been limited through a more spacious living area.

It is not surprising that women especially had psychological problems after resettlement. In Old Nubia women had a widespread form of therapy to offset these problems, the *zār*-cult. As Kennedy says the *zār* was mainly an outlet for the women to relieve inner tensions by reflecting on their own low status, the exclusion from religious life, the gender segregation, isolation, and the fear of being divorced. Through this cult they had a way of getting attention for themselves and their problems. Surely at the same time the *zār* was a possibility to have one's wishes fulfilled and to bind the husband to oneself as he was obliged to take over the ceremony's often extensive costs. Many times this financial burden prevented him from being able to afford another marriage. But the *zār* lost its influence after resettlement.

The impression is created that the decline of this former outlet led to deteriorating psychological problems which led to visits to the doctor and modern medicine. Women go to see a doctor for minor reasons and complain about various problems. They expect the prescription of expensive medicine, the more costly the better. The husband has to pay for the treatment as well as the medicine. As the woman has to take drugs she clearly has a reason to complain about her situation when she is back at home and a possibility to point to it in daily life. The problem is that many physicians prescribe numerous medicines because they are expected to and not because the patient really needs them. The population needs to be educated about possible adverse effects, correct dosages, and the possibility of drug resistance or addiction. Only when patients do not call for so much medication but understand that the quality of a doctor does not depend on the amount of drugs he prescribes can they be treated in a more effective way. Until then iatrogenesis will keep increasing based on the growing utilization of modern medicine.

But on the other hand psychological problems often lead to physical problems as well. Toubia states that women in Sudan often suffer from psychosomatic diseases and this fact explains why women are found in clinics and hospitals disproportionately. She says "it is

an unconscious cry for help and a plea for sympathetic ear for their complaints which they are unable to express openly.”¹⁵¹

For future resettlements, male planning committees should be aware of a gender specific presentation of the problem. Socio-cultural shaping of the sexes' roles need to be determined, evaluated and considered in respect to resettlement plans. Ethnologists should lay a foundation for successful resettlement through gender studies.

It is important to plan for sufficient and easily accessible health facilities yet no hospital in the world is capable of curing illnesses evoked by bad behaviour patterns. Because of this, intense examination in advance of the culture of those going to be resettled is critical. There is a need at the beginning to consider which cultural aspects should be supported, which problems are to be expected, and how to counteract them. Care has to be taken that modern medicine does not become the cure for every problem; otherwise it will become more of a problem itself than help. Instead, effort should be put into insights derived from the careful consideration of the individual culture which would develop into concepts of prevention, enlightenment and health care.

151 TOUBIA, "Women and Health in Sudan," p. 104.

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A Collective Gender Perception? Female Perspectives towards Resettlement in the Dar al- Manāsīr

Petra Weschenfelder

1. Introduction

The Merowe Dam has now drowned most of the villages in the Fourth Cataract area. Many members of the Manāsīr, one of the ethnic groups who lived along the shores of the River Nile in the Fourth Cataract, now live in the resettlement schemes al-Mukābrāb or al-Fidda, or are trying to re-arrange their lives along the new shoreline created by the Merowe dam.¹ As had been intensively studied, the environmental setting, specifically the scarcity of farming land in the cataract area, had greatly influenced the lifestyles of the Manāsīr people:² the need for wage work abroad to compensate for this scarcity was a major issue that, even though it influenced the lives of men and women in equal terms, was largely studied from the male perspective. Such perspectives either investigated different job opportunities in various countries and the means of Manāsīr men to return to their homeland in later life, or the limited possibility of cash crop cultivation, mainly organized by the men. Manāsīr women often remained in the Dar al-Manāsīr, contributing to the family income as well as raising their children according to Manāsīr customs. However, the contributions of women to the lifestyle of the Manāsīr remained largely neglected in these studies. Their connection to their home land and their fears and perspectives towards

1 HÄNSCH, "Chronology of a Displacement," pp. 179–228.

2 See for example JACKSON, "A Trek in Abu Hamed District," pp. 1–35; INNES, "The Monasir Country," pp. 185–191; BECK, "Escaping from Narrow Confines – Returning to Tight Communities," pp. 201–211; id., "Die Aneignung der Maschine," pp. 66–77; id., "Livelihood Is Agreement," pp. 153–172; id., "Crisis, Innovation and the Social Domestication of the New," pp. 5–48; SALIH, *The Manasir of Northern Sudan*.

the resettlement deserves equal voice.³ My purpose is to address this desideratum, and in 2006 I led a research team (consisting of Amel Suleiman Badi, at that time Assistant Professor at the Department of History of the University of Khartoum, and Rihab Khider El-Rasheed, at that time Inspector for the Sudanese National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums) to the village of Kirbekān in the Dar al-Manāsīr to focus on the social and economic roles of Manāsīr women and their perspectives on the resettlement before it actually took place.⁴ However, the research showed that such perspectives were not as easy to perceive as assumed.

2. The Locality

The village of Kirbekān – the focal point of my cultural anthropological field research in February 2006⁵ – was part of the archaeological fieldwork concession area of the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition (H.U.N.E.). During the time of the field research, the Manāsīr committee representing the Manāsīr inhabitants of the Fourth Cataract in their claims to stay in their home land or to get proper compensation for the losses directly connected the work of the foreign archaeological missions to the dam construction.⁶ This perception cannot be dismissed since archaeological interest in the Dar al-Manāsīr just started due to the threat of inundation to the previously unstudied prehistoric and historic Sudanese heritage site. The Sudanese government that had invited the international community of archaeologists to document and rescue this heritage also initiated the dam construction. Therefore several archaeological missions faced the threat of exclusion from their concession areas.⁷ These tensions on the larger political stage – several members of the Manāsīr committee resided in England – also affected my research. Due to gender roles in the Dar al-Manāsīr, my research team was mainly welcomed by Manāsīr women either alone or in the company of other women. When these women told their husbands about one of my research questions that concerned the number of

3 These issues have been studied in other areas of the Sudan, cf. GRAWERT, *Making a Living in Rural Sudan*.

4 WESCHENFELDER, "H.U.N.E. 2006," pp. 81–88; id., "Life and Tradition of Manasir Women in Kirbekan," pp. 207–214; id., "Manāsīr Women's Contributions to Economic and Social Life," pp. 75–88.

5 In addition to my field study the Humboldt-University Nubian Expedition supported several research projects recording aspects of modern lifestyles of the contemporary inhabitants of the Fourth Cataract area, cf. EIGNER, "Kirbekan," pp. 113–124; id., "Kirbekan II," pp. 71–80; id., "Kirbekān," pp. 127–160; HABERLAH, "Cultural Landscape of Dar al-Manasir," pp. 49–74; HABERLAH & VON DEM BUSCHE, "Das Dorf Atoyah auf der Insel Sherari," pp. 125–135.

6 KLEINITZ & NÄSER, "The Loss of Innocence," pp. 253–280; id., "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," pp. 269–304; HAFSAAS-TSAKOS, "Ethical Implications of Salvage Archaeology and Dam Building," pp. 49–76.

7 NÄSER, "Die Humboldt University Nubian Expedition 2006", pp. 99ff.

their children, the husbands feared that we would get census data to evaluate the compensation claims of the villagers. The situation was mitigated by Amel Suleiman Badi, who translated during the interviews. Amel Badi is not only familiar with the local dialect but also has a research background as a specialist in Sudanese local history. Her presence not only created a situation that allowed immediate connection to the women, but also could explain our research interests in comparison to other ethnic groups in Sudan. Thus the fears of the villagers could be allayed through the creation of a transparent research outline.⁸

Such explanation might have encouraged specific answers which the interviewees might have expected from the researchers. To counteract such dynamics, neighboring women who often visited during the afternoons were invited to discuss statements from individual interviews and issues that were provoked by the research questions. Such discussion groups led to intense dialogues in which the women compared their individual experiences and views and thereby disclosed locality, age, and biography as important features of their perceptions.

3. The Issue of Locality in Female Perspectives: Land Rights, Property, and Education in the Dar al-Manāsīr and in Kīrbekān

El-Kīrbekān was situated on the eastern shore of the Nile. Cultivable land was, there and elsewhere in the Dar al-Manāsīr, divided into different categories: uplands, riverside land, and wadi beds. Uplands watered by diesel pumps were cultivated by the men mainly to produce cash crops.⁹ According to the practice in other parts of the Dar al-Manāsīr, women who were entitled to inherit that land according to Islamic law would transfer their rights to their brothers. In return they would be supported by their brothers in case of divorce or the death of their husbands.¹⁰ Due to limited research time, this practice of land transfer could not be observed in Kīrbekān.

Usage rights over the riverbanks were inherited by both men and women. However, the men would transfer the land use to their wives.¹¹ Also in Kīrbekān the women had had access to a plot of land at the riverside as well as in the wadi beds between the hamlets. There they used the inundated land to grow animal fodder for their small stock. Animal husbandry was an important activity in the

8 The question concerning the number of children for example referred to different habits or rituals in association with the first birth in contrast to further births; cf. WESCHENFELDER, "H.U.N.E. 2006," p. 83; id., "Life and Tradition of Manasir Women in Kīrbekān," p. 210.

9 Salih, *The Manasir of Northern Sudan*, pp. 112ff.

10 Ibid., p. 219.

11 Ibid., pp. 115–118.

Dar al-Manāsīr, with several aspects to it.¹² The women who owned these animals supplied their families with dairy products and meat. Since the animals could be and were sold in times of immediate cash need, animal husbandry was also an important income generating activity. The women in Kirebēkān stated they were free to sell their animals to buy personal items but also considered family needs within such transactions.¹³ Furthermore, sheep play a central role as a sacrifice in most Islamic ritual activities.¹⁴ Such activities strengthen family ties and by their inherent reciprocity assure the mutual support of community members. Therefore women's activities in animal husbandry contributed to social life in Kirebēkān and provided an important share of the family income.¹⁵

So far this is a general outline of how Manāsīr customs influenced female village life with regard to land use and land rights in general. However, the local practice in this specific area differed greatly from that in other areas of the Dar al-Manāsīr. The women would hand down part of the inundated land at the riverside and in the wadis together with some of their animals to their daughters as soon as the daughters took over responsibility for their own little herds. This happened after the girls left primary school. The animals provided the start for their daughters' animal wealth, which they would contribute to their own families after their marriages.

The girls were married by the age of 13 to 15. One reason for marrying girls so young was for their social and economic security. In Kirebēkān such arrangements were preferred to higher education for the girls. Local education provided only for primary school, and girls were not sent away to attend a high school. As the women of Kirebēkān told us, the question of whether girls would receive higher education was not a question of distance since a high school was available on one of the nearby islands. The main aim of the families seems to have rather been the early marriage of the girls.

In the village this lack of higher education for girls resulted in a disadvantage for the women. Girls with higher education could learn the profession of a *dāya*, a trained midwife. These trained women usually return to their home area to practice their profes-

12 Husbandry was even seen as the most important income-generating occupation in the Fourth Cataract by SALIH, *The Manasir of Northern Sudan*, p. 44. However, in this statement it is not clear whether it refers to animal husbandry in general or the activities of the nomadic part of the Manāsīr population.

13 Yet, the restricted time for research did not allow for a visit to the local markets, so that we could see if women themselves sold their products and to what extent they controlled this income.

14 Cf. BOND, "Karama," pp. 276f.

15 Women furthermore participated in their husbands' cash crop production which they supported by weeding and harvesting. Participant observation involved accompanying the women of one family to their cash crop fields outside the village where they harvested *shammār* (cumin).

sion, but due to the lack of girls with higher education that was not the case in this village. Instead, tasks like assistance in childbirth were done by an older woman reputed for her knowledge in these fields instead of a properly trained midwife. Young mothers who recently had experienced giving childbirth emphasized this lack of a trained midwife as a disadvantage in Kirbekān.

Another reason to keep the girls in the village was to assure the integrity of the heritable land. By not sending the girls away, the possibility that they would find marriage partners outside of the family and share inheritance rights with people from a different family or even a different ethnic background could be avoided. Instead the local endogamous marriage practice avoided the fragmentation of inheritable land, since land rights were kept within the extended family.

In Kirbekān this resulted in the presence of several Manāsīr women – young mothers – from Kassala. A part of this city at the river Gash is mainly inhabited by Manāsīr from the Fourth Cataract region who had left the area with their families. In Kassala these families lived close together, so that the girls grew up with many Manāsīr customs. These younger women had married back into the village and built a family with their cousins. One reason could have been the problematic legal status of upland usage rights in the cataract area, where differences between Islamic law of inheritance supported by the government and the customary law of the Manāsīr were reported: according to Islamic law expatriated descendants would have their share in the inheritance whereas in Manāsīr practice they did not.¹⁶ Yet in the resettlement situation, claims for compensation of land had to be made to the government according to Islamic law. This not only led to Manāsīr women from Kassala marrying into their extended family in Kirbekān, but also Manāsīr families who had settled elsewhere returning home.

Their perspectives not only contrasted with the experience of the women born and raised in Kirbekān. When talking about their contrasting lifestyles they also influenced the expectations of the Kirbekān women. They for example went home to their families in Kassala for childbirth instead of staying in Kirbekān where they could not have been supported by a *dāya*. Because of conflicting statements we did not quite understand if the Kirbekān women had known about the existence of the profession before and seen this lack as a problem or if it just came up due to the differing perspectives from Kassala.

16 For legal details of this practice see SALIH, *The Manasir of Northern Sudan*, pp. 208–212, 219.

4. Breaking Down the Perspective Further: Local, Generational, and Individual Perceptions of Female Tasks and Roles and the Resettlement

Due to their differing geographic backgrounds, the women in Kirbekān had varying attitudes towards their social and economic roles, their upcoming resettlement and their prospects after the resettlement. One example of this concerns age as well as environment. Before the start of the Merowe dam construction, this area was only remotely connected to central areas in the Sudan. Public transport, by lorries and Bedford buses, was irregular and hazardous along desert trails; shipping was difficult due to the conditions of the cataracts, and trains and roads largely bypassed this area. With the dam construction, an asphalt road provided access for the construction lorries, and was also used by the Manāsīr people for direct access to the Sudanese capital or larger market areas. Women of the “grandmother” generation, who – due to past conditions – had mainly spent their lives in the cataract area, were largely attached to their homeland and did not want to leave it. The elder women gave their fear of strangers as the main reason for their opposition to resettlement, clearly favoring the close social relations they had in the village. They feared that they would have to deal with members of other groups in the resettlement area.¹⁷ In contrast, this was not seen as a problem by the younger women, since many of them had grown up in a bigger city and had already moved once from their home, or were used to the closer contact with the nearby centers due to the asphalt road.

These younger women were further used to varying degrees of access to amenities: the women coming in from Kassala had experienced a completely different lifestyle before they married and subsequently moved to Kirbekān. They had enjoyed a regulated water supply and had not been previously trained in the care of animals. As already stated for their first childbirth they returned to their mothers’ homes in Kassala and thereby got necessary medical treatment from a trained midwife. Their different experiences probably influenced the attitudes which the women of the young mothers generation in Kirbekān displayed concerning their upcoming resettlement. These women stated that they expected to enjoy benefits from the resettlement -- mainly concerning the availability of running water, medical treatment and higher education for their daughters.¹⁸

17 Cf. CALKINS, “Agricultural Encroachment in Wadi Mukabrab Area,” pp. 229–252.

18 Experiences within agricultural schemes realized during the Nasser dam project show that prospects are far from sufficient for the life styles that were available before the resettlement, cf. INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, “Report and

However, this was a largely localized perception, as is shown by the contrasting example of Shīrrī Island, one of the islands in the Fourth Cataract situated in the H.U.N.E. concession area. There the women feared the loss of their individual freedom as a result of the agricultural scheme.¹⁹ This freedom was equally closely connected to the environmental setting of the Dar al-Manāsīr and the division of labor there: while the men were out in the fields during the day-time or even abroad for several months or years, Manāsīr women in Kirbekān acted as spokespeople for their families. These public roles as representatives were supported by the presence of the women in the house during the afternoon visiting time. The women would go to the other hamlets or even nearby villages without male company. Also the hamlets reflected this practice of a greater public role for women. Whereas Islamic building practice separates a male open sphere and a secluded female sphere, this was not true of the architecture in Kirbekān.²⁰ The rooms radiated from the inner courtyard accessible by the main complex door. There the women would receive their guests. These architectural features reflected the scarcity of building space in the cataract as well as the differing female social roles. Guests were most often other women from their village or from other villages in the vicinity but the research team as well. Thereby the women got news and discussed village matters but most importantly mediated between different branches of their families and promoted the aims of their family among other villagers.²¹ Women were thereby influential in social matters since their mediation was of high importance within village life. It could have been the loss of this position that the women of Shīrrī feared in the face of resettlement.

Another localized issue was that of women's work itself. Many of the younger women in Kirbekān saw benefits in their resettlement since they blamed their hard work on the inaccessibility of the cataract area. They had to carry drinking water on their backs and shoulders from the river to the house three times a day, and carry water from the channel and provide fodder for the animals three times a day in addition to cooking, cleaning, child care, farming,

Recommendation of the President to the Executive Board on a Proposed Loan to The Democratic Republic of the Sudan for the New Halfa Irrigation Rehabilitation Project," pp. 8ff. In the context of the Fourth Cataract resettlement the allocation of running water, health care and education were used in the propaganda of the Sudanese government as the major benefits the population of the Dar al-Manāsīr would gain; cf. FAILER, MUTAZ & EL TAYEB, "Merowe," p. 73. Since this study is based on research collected in 2006 the realizations of the promised allocation are not evaluated here, but cf. HÄNSCH, "Chronology of a Displacement."

¹⁹ Claudia Näser, personal communication.

²⁰ EIGNER, "Kirbekan" p. 116.

²¹ Women not only represented their families by receiving guests in their homes but also at public gatherings such as wedding ceremonies; cf. SALIH, *The Manasir of Northern Sudan*, p. 44.

etc.²² In many areas of the Fourth Cataract, gold washing instead of animal care was an important off-farm activity practiced by the local Manāsīr women and girls.²³ Yet, in Kirebēkān it had been abandoned a generation ago in favor of the intensification of animal husbandry. Another example is house building: while the women in Kirebēkān stated that house building was a solely male task, women in the village of Atoyah on the island of Sherari took part in the construction of houses.²⁴ The great variability in habits and social practices in the Dar al-Manāsīr thus led to the different attitudes of the women towards their daily tasks.²⁵

In addition to geographic and generational differences in perspective, individual backgrounds also influenced the expectations of women. One woman owned the local shop in the village and another shop in the Sudanese capital.²⁶ This woman claimed that if she did not like the resettlement area she would move to Khartoum. Flexibility in working to generate additional income also accounted for the relaxed perspective of a local hennāna, a woman trained in the adornment of women, especially the application of henna on brides.

Another woman we met in Kirebēkān was actually born and raised in Kabushiya in the Shendi Reach. She married a Manāsīr man from Kirebēkān and had lived with him in Saudi Arabia where he worked.²⁷ To claim the compensation for their house and fields she came alone with her baby daughter to the village while her husband stayed in Saudi Arabia. She also did not like the conditions in the village and was happy to be able to return to Saudi Arabia after the flooding. Her background and approach towards female tasks, roles and perspectives also contributed to the young women's discussions of their perspectives of the resettlement.

22 For detailed descriptions of daily tasks of the women in Kirebēkān see Weschenfelder, "H.U.N.E. 2006"; id., "Life and Tradition of Manāsīr Women in Kirebēkān."

23 SALIH, *The Manasir of Northern Sudan*, p. 49. See also a photograph by David Haberlah, "Washing Gold at the Nile 4," Flickr, March 19, 2005, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/haberlah/41928474>.

24 HABERLAH & VON DEM BUSSCHE, "Das Dorf Atoyah auf der Insel Sherari," p. 134; pl. 10.

25 In other rural areas in the Sudan women combine the tasks in the household with work in the fields and the managing of herds as well; cf. HALL & ISMAIL, *Sisters under the Sun*, p. 125. Even though many women in urban areas may not go to the Nile to get the daily drinking water for their families, many women work outside the home, which they also combine with household tasks and childcare; EL BAKRI & KAMEIR, "Women's Participation in Economic, Social and Political Life in Sudanese Urban and Rural Communities" pp. 194–196.

26 Weschenfelder, "H.U.N.E. 2006," p. 85; id., "Life and Tradition of Manāsīr Women in Kirebēkān," pp. 211ff.

27 For labor migration in the Sudan see GRAWERT, *Making a Living in Rural Sudan*, pp. 117–152; for labor migration concerning the Manasir see BECK, "Escaping from Narrow Confines."

5. Conclusion

This study showed that there was a wide variety of perceptions of their roles and prospects among the women in Kirbekān. Yet, this study was undertaken in the upcoming event of a resettlement program and one can argue that it was this particular event that led to the results of the research. That is, the dam construction led to the presence of women from a variety of areas with differing social and economic roles and differing living standards. This setting in Kirbekān therefore introduced an outside versus inside comparison from within the village community and influenced the women's notions of their social and economic roles in the Dar al-Manāsīr and their positions on the resettlement. Another aspect which influenced our findings is the perspectives of the different generations within the community who had experienced several changes to their roles and tasks, and reflected on those when describing their prospects. Furthermore, apart from their local origin and their age group the individual background of each of the women from Kirbekān attributed to their perspectives on their tasks and their prospects for the resettlement. In addition, the comparison with other villages in the Dar al-Manāsīr shows that social practices within each area differed greatly, and thereby provided for different views on the resettlement. Some saw the move as beneficial, due to local amenities such as running water, medical treatment and higher education, and others saw it as disadvantageous due to a diminishing of social influence, a loss of income opportunities, and the loss of individual freedom.

This discussion shows that a collective perspective of "the Manāsīr women" on their daily life in the Dar al-Manāsīr did not exist, even within one single village, and less so compared to other areas in the Dar al-Manāsīr. The social and economic roles of the women and their perspectives, hopes and fears in the advent of the resettlement project cannot be presented as representative of the whole population of "the Manāsīr women", but should be studied from localized, generational and biographical backgrounds instead.

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Islam, Migration, and Nubian Women in Egypt: Muhammad Khalil Qāsim's *al-Shamandurah* & *al-Khalah Aycha*

Naglaa Mahmoud

داريا سكينه تعرف تماما معني هذه الزيجه البيضاء، فلسوف تنقطع بسببها
صله جمال باهله هنا، و هناك في مصر، فلا يزورهم و لا يزورونه، لا يحس
...بواجب ازاءهم و لا يحسون بواجب ازاءه

Daria Sakina knows very well the meaning of this marriage to the white woman. He (Daria's son) will be disconnected from his family, exiled to Masr [Cairo] where no one will visit him, no one will feel any duty towards him, nor will he feel any towards us.¹

Point of departure

This article discusses the intersection of Islam, gender and migration. In addition, it explores Nubian women as portrayed in the Nubian Egyptian novelist Muhammad Khalil Qasim's literary production of *al-Shamandurah* and his collection of short stories *al-Khalah Aycha*.² Both the novel and short stories depict the encounters Nubian women faced during the historical periods of displacement, forced migration and relocation due to the construction and inauguration of the Aswan High Dam (1960–1970). The challenges confronting the major female characters of Daria Sakina and Auntie Aycha are gateways to the intersection of gender issues with complex migration processes and uncontested Islamic values about women's roles in a Nubian village.

1 QĀSIM, *al-Shamandurah*, p. 76. All translations from *al-Shamandurah* are by the author.

2 Muhammad Khalil Qāsim (1921–1968) is a prominent Nubian writer who spent decades of his life in prison because of his anti-colonial and communist activism. He wrote poems, books and short stories. The two texts discussed are the only ones preserved.

The female characters of *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khalah Aycha* are integral to understanding how a community disaster mobilizes gender dynamics. It is not the western feminism of male dominance, female oppression, and patriarchal social structure that is inherent in the Nubian community of Upper Egypt. In fact, it is the flooding triggered by the rise in the water level caused by the Aswan Dam that accelerated the migration of Nubian men to the bigger cities of the North. When skin color is mentioned as playing a significant role in gender relations, it is inherently intertwined with the capitalism and greediness of the big cities of the North, specifically Cairo.

Introduction

Rural Nubian women have come to embrace multiple identities in the context of Egypt's state-building politics of the last century. These changes strengthened their role while often tripling their burdens. Alongside their Arab Egyptian peasant counterparts, Nubian women struggled against patriarchy and the stigmatization of rural life by the urban elite. Nubian women are additionally laden with the ever-shifting connotations associated with their Africanity and the blackness³ of their skin color, as variously perceived by Arabs and Europeans amidst evolving political contexts.

The beauty of Nubian blackness is continually stigmatized because of images born of the trans-Saharan slave trade. There is no doubt that the superiority of whiteness⁴ over blackness developed during the Ottoman Empire, which provided top opportunities in the army or government for both Turkish or Ottoman immigrants and white slaves but rarely black slaves. The same hierarchy developed inside the harem⁵. Moreover, the urban elite and middle classes appear to have relied on the labor of black, mostly female slaves to supplement household staff long before the nineteenth century.⁶ Consequently, this preference for Caucasian white over African black continued through the decades of British colonial rule over Egypt and Sudan. Feminist scholar Fatima Siddiqi describes the current political and social consequences of enslavement: "It was a controlling reason behind both the Mahdist revolt of 1881–1899, between the Sudanese on one side and the Egyptians and then the British on the other, and it leaves its lasting legacy in the split between

3 I use the term blackness to refer to darker skin color. There are several layers of darkness in Southern Egyptian and Northern Sudanese colloquial Arabic. The darkest is *azraq* (blue), then *aswad* (black), then *asmar* (brown) and last is *qamhi* meaning wheat or brown. Nubians usually fall into the category of blue and black while the rest of Egyptians fall into *asmar* or *qamhi*.

4 I use the term "whiteness" here to refer to lighter skin color. Later, the paper argues that the contrast of whiteness and blackness is much deeper than skin color.

5 This is a separate part of a Muslim household reserved for wives and female slaves.

6 See WALZ and CUNO, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*.

the North and the South in Bilad-al-Sudan, 'the land of the blacks'.⁷ Contemporary racial slurs articulated against Nubian women as "black devils"⁸ or ugly Africans testify that whiteness of skin color has become the standard of many Egyptians' vision of female beauty.

In the literature of Nubian Egyptians, these concepts are troubled. In Qasim's work, the blackness of the Nubian woman is set in contrast to the whiteness of Cairo, the urban center of gravity that drags her children into servitude, and most often never returns them. Historically, the status of black women in Egypt and Nilotic neighbors further south was neither as powerless nor as racialized as it became in the colonial context. Although factors of class, ethnicity, race and religion undoubtedly influenced women's lives throughout all historical eras, Nubian women have always enjoyed a certain autonomy. Traditionally they worked as peasants, matchmakers, nannies, and midwives. In Egypt as well as in the larger family of Nilotic civilizations, there are numerous examples of black women ascending to the height of authority, including the famous Queen Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt.

Contemporary patriarchal practices in the Nubian Egyptian community are often attributed to the arrival of Arab Muslims in the 7th century. Feminist scholar Leila Ahmed has challenged this narrative, instead suggesting that women in African (in this context Nubian) societies faced more pronounced oppression during the era prior to Arab conquest. In her words, Ahmed argues that women in public spheres were mostly limited to the lower class in rural areas. The seclusion of women in the harem during the Ottoman Empire, for example, was a continuation of an ideal of protection and respect for women.⁹ Thus, the rural peasant has evolved to be an indicator of lower class practice. Ancient indigenous African communities, in this case Nubians in Egypt and Sudan, continued their agricultural practices. Nubian women continue agricultural practices, despite the association between these practices and the lower classes, which has been perpetuated until modern times

While a thorough treatment of this debate is beyond the scope of this present study, the essential point is that despite the profound and far-reaching changes in social structure brought about by the Muslim conquests, this was not the most significant turning point for Nubian women. In fact, it was the imposition of Western modernity that most profoundly fractured gender dynamics within

7 SIDDIQI, *Women Writing Africa*, p. 21.

8 In a scene from the Egyptian comic film, *Saidi fel Gam'a al Amrikiyya*, one visitor sleeps with a Nubian prostitute and describes this as "experiencing the black night instead of the red one."

9 SIDDIQI, *Women Writing Africa*, p. 41.

Nubian Egyptian society. British intervention underscored the economic divide between urban and rural areas. During the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium that ruled both Egypt and Sudan, Muhammad Ali welcomed foreigners to settle in the country to accelerate its modernization. He encouraged them to immigrate and extended to them a sense of security. He gave foreigners privileges such as tax exemptions, customs reductions, consular protection and trials in mixed courts.¹⁰ Hence, some European foreigners initially settled in the region not as colonizers but as a foreign community, occupying a distinct space and cultivating social values that were clearly suspended above the indigenous masses. They formed an elitist stratum that maintained allegiance to, and prided itself upon, an affiliation with European culture.¹¹

While the nationalist 1952 revolution – also known as the Free Officers Coup – altered the power and wealth structure by promising people a more egalitarian society based on justice rather than inherited wealth and titles, it only changed the membership of the elite rather than eradicating class altogether. Rural areas became more impoverished and the city received a flow of male migrants. Consequently, urban women seemed, at least in theory, to attain a higher economic status. They enjoyed newfound freedom in pursuing their goals and ambitions. Geographically, Cairo became abundant with employment opportunities and better economic standards than Upper Egypt.

Nubian women, particularly after the construction of the Aswan High Dam, have developed a sense of identity distinct from urban *Aswangyia* (Aswanites), *Sa'yada* (Upper Egyptians), or *al-Baydaa* (Cairenes; literally, “the whites”). In addition to belonging to an underrepresented group, the Nubian woman journeys a difficult path to survive without her male Nubian partner. She confronts these challenges despite the dearth of scholarship on her social or political challenges. Until recent decades brought a greater number of Black African immigrants and refugees to Egypt, she alone could testify to the experience of color prejudice against black beauty in the state built upon her ancient homeland. The marginalization of several scholarly works that discuss the Nubian woman and her identity crisis in either the African or Middle Eastern context and the general scarcity of literature are due to Nubian women's lack of access to production of knowledge and culture on the national level. Cairo is the center and the source of artistic scenes and many Nubian women encounter logistical and financial difficulties in traveling the necessary distance. Thus, their literary production is pre-

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 40–43.

¹¹ Ibid.

dominantly buried in Aswan, in the far south of Egypt. In contrast, Nubian women residing in Khartoum, Sudan are much more visible and artistically celebrated than their counterparts in Egypt.

It is intrinsically accepted as an authentic voice when women writers explore in literature the voices on gender dynamics. The matter is different when a male writer ventures into speaking of the female voice in his literature. However, looking at gender dialectics in the writings of male Nubian novelists offers another possibility for interpretation. Muhammad Khalil Qasim's works offer a voice on gender dynamics in the Nubian household. His meticulous descriptions of the Nubian village woman in both *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khala Aycha* provide a rich subject for discussion. In his masterpiece, *al-Shamandurah*, the Nubian woman – whether she is a mother, a daughter, a sister or just a member of the community – is grappling with tensions, disparities and financial and social insecurities. Because Qasim was writing in the era prior to the mass flooding of Nubian ancestral lands by the Aswan High Dam, his descriptions are a unique tableaux of Nubian women on the verge of momentous change. Surprisingly, he seldom characterizes Nubian women as victims of the social patriarchal structure, but as individuals who have agency to change the status quo.

The mass exodus of Nubian Egyptians from villages to several major cities impacted the core Nubian family and its structure. Male Nubians were forced to leave their families and seek opportunities for wage labor in the urban worlds of Cairo and Alexandria. Nubian women were thus left to face resettlement alone, transitioning to a different environment while coping with impoverishment and stigmatization of their skin color. However, their struggle for acknowledgement and space is not marked by an anti-male intonation. The Nubian woman's cause is to work for better social and economic conditions for rural women. To fully understand the dimensions of this struggle, religious beliefs and migration to urban areas are crucial factors in the formation of Nubian women's identities.

Islam, Migration, and Gender

There is almost a consensus amongst scholars of gender and Islam that the manipulation of Islamic texts in a male dominated culture plays a role in gender disparity amongst Muslims. The verse of the Quran Muslim men quote is, "Men are guardians over women, because of that in respect of which Allah has made some of them excel others, and because of the men spending of their wealth" (Surah 4, verse 34). When it comes to migration and movement for the betterment of one's conditions, the quoted verse says, "You females,

stay in your houses and do not act like women from the days of ignorance" (Surah 33, verse 33). The Quranic texts and the Prophet's sayings are decontextualized when it comes to their application to Muslim women by men with agendas of control and superior power hierarchy. These verses, while intended to protect women and honor them, are used to restrict their movement and double their responsibilities.

Some argue that the patriarchal system is not indigenous to African cultures and communities. In ancient Egyptian and Nubian history, for example, the emphasis was on matrilineal lineage as the core of the society. Family heritage or *miras* in Arabic is divided and distributed according to the woman's lineage. In other words, the woman in the family holds authority over much of the family's possessions. Arab culture, however, was patriarchal in the era prior to Islam. It emphasized masculinity and gave priority to men in power. Imam Faisal Abdul-Rauf says that before the revelation of Islam to the Prophet Muhammad, Arab women had no rights; they were men's property. Before Islam, men could have as many wives as they wanted.¹² For Arabs before Islam, to have a baby girl was a shame. There was even the commonly accepted tradition of burying girls because of the shame and degradation they brought to their clans. Islam, as a religion, prohibited these traditions, gave women a right to inheritance, and emphasized the overall fair treatment of women. Over the course of history, these ideals of justice and equality to women have been ignored. With the introduction of Islam to the East African region in the 7th and 8th centuries, and Nubia's conversion to Islam, the patriarchal version of Arab practice in this region has often conflicted with indigenous African traditions.

Western feminists, on the other hand, have been inclined to regard religion as another source of women's subordination. They tend to cite the way women are often represented as subordinate in religious texts, and the frequency with which religion is used to justify and maintain men's dominant position in society. Although these charges are leveled at all the major religions, Islam has a reputation for being "anti-woman" and for supporting a segregated social system where women are economically and politically marginalized. It is no surprise that western feminists have not drawn upon Islamic texts when addressing gender inequalities in Muslim societies.¹³

Anne Jennings refutes some of the stereotypical Orientalist claims that women's subordination was basically due to Islamic beliefs and peculiar only to Muslim women when she mentions, "Muslim women are not the passive tools of men, obediently enduring

12 ABDUL-RAOUF, "The Prophet was a Revolutionary Feminist."

13 HASHIM, "Reconciling Islam and Feminism."

ignorance and confinement. Instead, they are themselves actors, concerned with influence, persuasion, and the negotiation of social order to their own advantage.”¹⁴ However, she concurs that there is considerable paternalism towards women in Islam itself. “Women’s subordination is mandated by Islam in certain of its legal and religious texts, and by a complex of traditional values that are regarded as Islamic by the villagers.”¹⁵ The unique articulation of Jennings’ discussion on gender and Islam is her transcendence of the Nubian woman’s blackness as an influential factor in their economic disempowerment. Her anthropological study on Nubian women of West Aswan takes the reader into another realm, considering the Nubian village holistically. Her explanation of what it means to grow up as a female in West Aswan is set in the context of village life in general. Jennings mentions that rural Nubian women work in tourism to earn extra money. She maintains that the involvement of village women with tourism is a prime example of women’s informal economic activity. The “informal economy” can be defined as a variety of occupations in which people work for goods instead of money or for money that is not reported to the government and thus remains unrecorded in official figures.¹⁶ Jennings presents the idea of independence inherent in Nubian women villagers: “Nubian women have traditionally (stemming perhaps from pre-Islamic times) had the right to earn extra money; in the past, they raised sheep and goats to sell, which helped them when their husbands were migrant workers, but which they continued to do even when their husbands were living at home.”¹⁷ Therefore, the plight of Nubian women is not totally due to remnants of the Arab patriarchal system.

Rural Urban Migration and Nubian Women

Much of the existing literature on Egyptian women focuses on Cairo and reflects the situation of educated women of the middle class. While migration is often voluntary, in the case of Nubian men, it is not. Migration from rural to urban areas in the case of Nubians is longstanding. Because of the paucity of arable land in this part of Nubia, men have been leaving the area to find work for several generations. Nubia witnessed a series of floods due to the erection and heightening of dams in 1903, 1912, and 1933, culminating in the building of the Aswan High Dam in 1964. In his plan to compensate Nubians, Nasser relocated them onto new land north of Aswan. The Nubians’ main source of living was agriculture near the Nile, but

¹⁴ JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, pp. 3–5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

the newly settled lands were not as close to the river as the Nubians' older villages. Although socio-economic conditions are principal factors in the pace of migration, men and women always choose to migrate. The Nubians' experience with migration is complex. The relocation of the Nubian villages due to the building of the Aswan High Dam was mandated by the state. After a series of policies the state used to convince Nubians to leave their villages, males continued migrating to Cairo and Alexandria because the new Nubian villages did not offer them much improvement in their lives.

Migration experiences are not gender neutral. The migration process and its causes and effects impact men and women differently. The differences in these experiences are due to the role, behavior, and relationships that society assigns to each of them. Manthiba Phalane argues in her "Gender, Migration and the Reconfiguration of Labour Market" that whether for men or women, the migration process is always for the sake of better living conditions. The reasons both men and women move are due to a lack of employment opportunities and conditions of poverty, civil wars, political tensions in Africa and elsewhere in the world.¹⁸ She continued that gender norms about the inappropriateness of women migrating autonomously, the constraining effects of their traditional family roles, and women's lack of social and economic independence, all hinder women's participation in migration and in the international labor market.¹⁹ If this norm is applied to Nubian women, they have sought other sources to generate income, particularly after the socio-economic crisis of the 1960s and how it laid the foundation for the mass exodus of Nubians to Cairo and Alexandria. In Cairo, male migrants fell under the dehumanization of the capital. Smith mentions that the images of Nubians as *barabra*, slaves, African or black are produced overwhelmingly in the metropolitan center of Cairo in television, state publications, and museums.²⁰ In this regard, Nubian male migrants increased the load of their female counterparts. Large numbers of the sons intermarried with northern women in Cairo and Alexandria.

The representation of Nubian women in the literary texts of Muhammad Khalil Qasim presents the complexities of Nubian women struggling for identity formation. The accumulated concepts of female subordination, reiteration of whiteness as the exemplary beauty in popular culture, and urban migration to bigger cities after the industrialization of the nation are found in Qasim's novels. His *al-Shamandurah* offers an exemplary character of Daria Sakina who takes on the role of the head of the family while waiting for her son

18 PHALANE, "Gender, Migration and the Reconfiguration of Labour Market."

19 Ibid.

20 SMITH, "Place, Class, and Race in the Barabra Café."

to return, while Auntie Aycha acts as the repository of cultural heritage by maintaining the old Nubian myths.

Daria Sakina & al-Khala Aycha

The female characters in *al-Shamandurah* are strong, proud women negotiating space and asserting their equality with men. They are very often the ones who change the characters' destinies and keep other male characters alive. Readers of these works are baffled by the way women strive for financial and sexual security and independence, honor, and preservation of their lands, while concurrently anticipating the flooding of their villages or collecting donations to rebuild the relocated villages. The incomplete love story of Sharifa (a Nubian woman) and Hassan al-Masri (an Upper Egyptian with no roots in Nubia) is set in contrast with Jamal's (Daria Sakina's son working in Cairo) marriage to a white woman from "Masr" (which literally means "Egypt" but colloquially refers to the Cairo region). Yet those love stories are only subtexts to the larger theme of displacement, financial compensation, and relocation of Nubians to the new villages.

In addition, female characters in *al-Khala Aycha*²¹ present an example of women griots in Nubian communities. The elderly female auntie who recounts stories to the children's village is also an active member of the new community that supports rebuilding the cultural centers in the newly relocated villages of Nubia. Qasim's collection of short stories *al-Khala Aycha* follows the modernist school of realism. Qasim offers to his readers a series of real images of Nubian life, allowing readers to formulate their own picture of the Nubian past and present. In this collection, one finds almost every facet of Nubian heritage.

A recurring theme in African literature is the person who carries the memories of the ancestors. *al-Khala* or *al-Jadda* [The Auntie or Grandma] is the counterpart of the male griot who carries the memories of his ancestry. In Nubian tradition, the grandmother is the woman who stays most of the time with the children at home. She is the one who preserves the stories and narratives from the past, and passes them on to the children of the whole tribe. In my interview with Haj Jamal Suleiman, the author of the book *Nubian Myths*, in 'Aneba village in August 2016, I came to realize that the grandma is the main carrier of village history.

Muhammad Khalil Qasim uses his grandmother's stories to preserve the village tradition. Some of the stories recounted by grandmothers have become part of our everyday jargon such as "al-talta

21 Qāsim, *Al-khālah 'ayshah*.

tabta” meaning “the third is harsher.” This phrase which Qasim uses is woven into the fabric of the Arabic language to refer to the wisdom of learning from your recurring experiences. Following post-World-War-II poetic imagery, Qasim tells a story of respect to the elder woman in the village. In his short story *al-Khala Aycha*, Qasim recounts a young Nubian, Ahmad, starting to collect dues from Nubian villagers to establish a new school in New Nubia [Al-Tahjeer]. An elderly village woman screams, “Ahmad Effendi! Ahmad Effendi!!”, to attract his attention. He realizes that she had been waiting for him at the door, joyfully smiling and holding something in her hand. Ahmad bypasses her house and ignores her shouting. He believes that this elderly woman lives independently and cannot afford to pay dues to build a school. He is too embarrassed to ask for her donation. The elderly woman is saddened by Ahmad’s assumption that she is old, lonely and poor. She opens her hand and sobbingly hands Ahmad ten paper piasters. The money paper is intentionally a bit torn, symbolizing her anger at Ahmad’s indifference and embarrassment. Hugging the elderly Auntie while crying, Ahmad apologizes and takes her money.

The elder is hurt by the young man’s indifference to the little she owns. Although she believes that whatever she has will help in rebuilding the community, the younger Ahmad had questioned her ability to contribute to the New Nubian projects. In this short story that Qasim wrote during his early years in prison, he draws our attention to the importance of elders as carriers of the memories and histories of the village. Those female griots residing in Nubian villages are becoming extinct. Although there are several attempts to archive Nubian heritage, stories of ancestors are still taken for granted. It is the duty of young generations of artists and writers to preserve this valuable heritage. Qasim and following generations of writers register those stories in their literary productions.

Women and Nubian Literature of Crises

Often the literature of crises [*adab al-mehna*] draws its plots from the difficulty of reality itself. The catastrophe, or *al-mehna*, is the main protagonist. It is the instigator of minor actions or reactions by Nubian characters. The writer uses the rhetoric of descriptions to draw readers into the overall catastrophe inflicted upon the community. The plot of Qasim’s novel *al-Shamandurah* hinges on the dilemma of displacement and dispossession from their ancestral land. The novel describes at length nature, the Nile, and nights and days in the old village of Qattah. The females in the novel are primarily preoccupied with surviving the catastrophe of the anticipated

flooding. Generally, the character of the Nubian woman is not pre-occupied with acknowledgement or access to space in their social arena. The female characters are not set in contrast to men. Rather, they are fighting alongside men for their collective survival of the upcoming flood. The female figure in Qasim's novel is not eroticized in describing her sexuality, motherhood, and struggle with non-Nubian women. All her actions or reactions are a direct result of coping with a situation resulting from migration, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to an urban area.

Al-Shamandurah is a metaphorical story of a woman who is helping ships to rest near her land and yet is forced to leave her culture and her heritage and to relocate and adapt. It is a story of her journey on the Nile. At the outset of the novel, readers are struck with the image of a woman sitting quietly and drawing some figures in the sand and then distorting them. This woman, who is in fact the mother of the narrator, does not speak throughout the whole novel, yet we come to know her story of grief, loss, poverty, struggle, and later her death. Fateema, mother of Hamid, fears approaching her son or touching him. Diagnosed with epilepsy while pregnant with him, once while breastfeeding him she falls asleep, nearly killing him. Since this incident, she does not approach him or any of her children. Her husband, who loves her deeply but is helpless to heal her, escapes by taking another wife (Hajouba), and alienates her. Despite this sad story, we come to know that she insists on having her house registered in her son's name. Hamid describes her as "possessing something more than her kind gestures and looks: she is a strong woman who can stand up to my father."²² Here, the silence of the mother is a strong aspect of her resilience.

The rural Nubian woman's strength is manifested in several other characters. Batta, the narrator's sister, is a hardworking, dedicated and kind sibling who also helps in the field. She works hard on her father's land. Her initial fight with her stepmother, Hajouba, is justified. She is described as a girl who basically does all the harvest work in the field but does not participate in the feast. The narrator explains:

فقد سهرت علي الزرع و انتزعت "الهالوك" من بين جذوره، و و عزقت الارض و بتنتها و حولت الماء و حفظت مواقيت الري... فمن حقها اذن حين يكوم المحصول ان تعزل لنفسها كيله او كيليتين و تشتري لنفسها و تشتري لنفسها شيئا من المتجر او من السفينه السوداء التي ترسو علي مرافتنا في الموسم

She stayed up late to watch the harvest. She uprooted the orobanche and hoed the land and switched the water and memorized the schedule for irrigation. She has every right when it is time for the

22 QĀSIM, *al-Shamandurah*, p. 14.

harvest to set some aside and buy herself something from the store or from the black ship embarking on our shore this season.²³

Like Batta and closer to her age is Sharifa, the pretty young girl who is loved by every boy in the village. Sharifa, an orphan girl, helps her mother as they await her brother Jamal to return and assume his family responsibilities. Her ambiguous nostalgic remembrance and affection for the Upper Egyptian fugitive Hassan al-Masri, who attempted to sexually harass her in the cornfield, is the writer's way of insinuating the impossibility of a love story between them. This is emphasized by Sharifa's response when one of the girls asked her if she could marry him. Sharifa states that Hassan al-Masri is *halabi* or foreign, meaning that he is rootless and does not belong. Sharifa describes him to her sister in law, "Do not mention anything to Jamal. Hassan al-Masri is a stranger, not family; he is not a cousin of ours, he is not from the village – he is *halabi*."²⁴ Sharifa then marries Bora'i, a man from her village and her tribe, whom she had known since his boyhood.

Whenever prejudice against Nubians is discussed, the issue of blackness and color arises. Many scholars argue that there is discrimination against Nubians based on their skin color. However, objective scholarship contextualizes this prejudice within the economic and geographic location of the Nubian homeland. Nubian women speak about the whiteness of Masr and the fact that they detest it with every white person they encounter. Their hate for whiteness evokes their hate for urban living, the forced desertion of their loved ones and the city's manipulation and greed. Do women carry the color of the nation? Does color affect gender dynamics? Do we measure the standardized beauty of the nation by the blackness or whiteness of females or rather by the burdens of poverty, unemployment and exile that they go through? The story of Daria Sakina in *al-Shamandurah* perhaps offers a clue to answering these questions.

The story of Daria Sakina is indeed the story of Nubia. Daria Sakina is a woman who embraces, in her mobility and perseverance, an authentic example of a rural Nubian woman. Her strongholds of her land, her children and her Nubian traditions against the greediness of the cities of the North are representations of Nubia struggling to preserve its existence against the inundation of the Aswan High Dam, forced migrations and relocations.

Although Sakina is reaching old age, she still maintains her beauty and the physical strength to hold an axe and cultivate the land.

²³ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 428.

Her presence in the novel is symbolic of Nubian women in all rural areas. The narrator describes her:

داريا سكينه , المسكينه تعيش في النجع علي محصول بضعه نخلات و العمل في البيوت. تطحن و تغسل و تغربل و تعجن...و تربي في بيتها المهتمد بعض الدواجن و الحملان..اما القيراطان اللذان...فملاكهما فقد رهنتهما عند ابي وفاء لبعض ديونها..غلبانه

Daria Sakina is a poor woman who lives on the produce of few palm trees and serves at houses. She grinds, washes, strains, and kneads. In her tumbledown house, she raises a few chicken and lambs. She has two acres of land and she puts them on a mortgage to my father so that she can pay her debts. She is bereft.²⁵

The poverty of Daria Sakina is somehow related to her history in the village of "Qattah." She mentions that she comes from a previously enslaved family. She is solely responsible for providing her daughter with a decent life. While begging some men to give her land to cultivate, she tells the merchant who was jokingly proposing that she should marry Sheikh Amin:

و هل من المعقول ان يتزوج رجل مثل امين امراه مثلها, ابنه جاريه و عبد اعتقهما جد عبد الله الجزار؟

Is it logical that Amin would marry a woman like her, a daughter of a slave woman and slave man who were freed by the grandfather of Abdullah al-Jazzar?²⁶

Sakina's poverty and debt do not stop her from striving to live, and praying for her migrant son to come back. After Sheikh Amin, the merchant, declines her request to cultivate two acres, she seeks out Abdullah al-Jazzar, another villager who rents people's land for extra charge. When al-Jazzar inquires who would cultivate the land, she responds that she would be the person because she did so when her late husband was still alive. Against the male villagers' desire, she rents the land and starts cultivating it with her daughter Sharifa.

و مضت داريا تشمّر كمها الواسع و جرجار جلبابها و تمسك بالفاس و تتأفف ثم تبصق في راحه يدها تهوي بالفاس و تتوقف لتلهث ثم تعود الي العزق و التسويه بسرعه...حتي تتعب قليلا ملقيه براسها الي الخلف بينما تستند بيدها علي مقبض الفاس و تتأمل الرجال من حولها

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

Daria lifts her wide sleeves and her gown up and holds the axe, anxious, exhausted and spitting in her palm. She then puts the axe down and pauses so she can breathe, then goes back to hoeing and evening the land. When she gets a little tired, she throws her head a bit back while holding the handle of the axe in her hand and looking at the men around her.²⁷

Daria Sakina grieves for her son Jamal, who migrated to Cairo and retains no contact. When the government officials register the lands and palm trees of those affected by the flooding of the Aswan High Dam, and subsequent migration, Jamal is not present. Daria, having registered the land in his name, cannot file for compensation. She summons him in a letter, and describes his Cairo wife as *al-beyda*, the white woman. She sees his marriage to a woman from Cairo as his severing from his family in Nubia:

ارسلته الى مصر ليكدح , ابقاء علي شريحه الارض الصغيره ووفاء بديونهما, فاذا همصر تبتلعه و تبعده عنهما...و ربما الي الابد تقصيه عن الام التي تعبدته و التي ضحت بالزواج من اجله و من اجل هذه...اليتمه
داريا سكينه تعرف تماما معني هذه الزيجه البيضاء, فلسوف تنقطع بسببها صله جمال باهله هنا, و...هناك في مصر, فلا يزورهم و لا يزورونه, لا يحس بواجب ازاءهم و لا يحسون بواجب ازاءه

We sent him to Masr (Cairo) to work hard so that we could keep this small piece of land, and pay our debts. Surprisingly, Masr (Cairo) has swallowed him, kept him away from his mother, his mother who worshiped him and sacrificed her marriage for the sake of his.²⁸

Daria's greatest distress is the fact that her son is married to a white woman from Masr [Cairo]. Historically, Nubian families are saddened by these outside, Cairene marriages.

This is akin to a kidnapping, and the white woman is a criminal.

وربما كانت هذه البيضاء ينبوع سعادته لجمال..و ربما كانت طيبه طاهره و لكنها تعتبر مجرمه في نظر المجتمع الصغير الذي يعيش في نجعنا ..و ليس الفتى اقل اجراما منها هي التي تصيدته ..فقد سلبت هذه الزيجه البيضاء عصاره الحياه من جسد هذه الام و بريق الامل من عين هذه الشقيقه التعسه

This marriage to the white woman deprived the juice of life from the body of the mother and the stream of hope from the eye of the desperate sister.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁹ Ibid.

Daria's total rejection of her son's marriage to the white Cairene woman is symbolic of the attitudes of Nubian women towards Cairo and its kidnapping of their sons, husbands, and brothers, who are their major source of support. Women articulate this sentiment when they chat about why it is hurtful for them for their family member to marry a woman from Cairo. They say that they hate whenever the name of the city is mentioned because it evokes the face of every white woman.

و تضج الدار بالضحك ، حتي داريا سكينه سمحت لنفسها ان تضحك ، تضحك : ذلك ان زوج هذه الشاطره التي عادت من مصر منذ شهور هجرها الي زوجه بيضاء، فعادت تندب حظها و تنفث حقدها شهور كلما جري اسم المدينه علي لسان الناس، تكره كل وجه ابيض، تكره سعديه لانها بيضاء و لا تتصور حسن المصري

The house is full of laughter. Even Daria Sakina is laughing and laughing at this apparently intelligent Nubian woman whose husband abandoned her for a white woman from Cairo. The Nubian wife is infuriated now at anyone from the city and pours her grudge over anyone who praises the city. The Nubian wife hates every white face, she hates Saadia because she is white.³⁰

The historical contrast of Nubian women with Cairene white women has influenced certain views of Nubian men about their own women. Nubian women are indeed in trauma because their male counterparts prefer to marry white Cairene women. In the previous section, readers see the views of Nubian women on the whiteness of Cairene women. Imagine the opinion of the Nubian man. Some men take pride in the beauty of their women. For example, in the beginning of the novel, Bor'ai is in love with Sharifa. Towards the end, when Hassan al-Masri leaves the village, Sharifa is saddened by his departure. Sharifa and Hassan al-Masri's story is juxtaposed with the story of a Nubian woman who is seduced by a building contractor from Upper Egypt, a *halabi*. The village lawyer describes how the halabi cornered the Nubian woman alone. She states: "give me a chance to get ready for what you want from me." In the end, she deceives him, crushing his head on the building he had just completed. Here, the Upper Egyptian, who attacks a Nubian woman and tries to rape her, is described as *halabi*. She smartly outmaneuvers and murders him.³¹

Readers are really astonished at Jamal's justification for his mother's and sister's rejection of his white lady. The story of Jamal was mentioned previously. He is the Nubian boy who settled in

³⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 478–479.

Cairo and married a white woman, named Zanouba, disgracing his mother, Daria Sakina, and his sister, Sharifa, who believe that she is responsible for blocking his home visits; she has stolen their son and brother. Eventually, Jamal and his wife return to his village in Aswan. Zanouba does her best to win over the hearts of his family. She gains the respect and love of most in the village, but not Jamal's mother and sister. Consider this dialogue between Zanouba and her husband Jamal:

النساء يفهمن ما في عيون الاخريات يا جمال. انها تمقتني.
 انها لا تمقتك بل تغار منك، فانت بيضاء جميله بينما هي سمراء عجوز.
 حتي شريفه افتح عيني فجاء فاضدطها تراقبني خلسه و في عينيها الحيره.
 انت الملولمه يا زنوبه. لماذا تفتحين عينيك عليها فجاء. المساله يجب ان تترك للزمن

- Women understand what is in the eyes of other women, Jamal.
 She hates me [meaning his mother].

- She does not detest you but she is jealous of you. You are white and pretty while she is black and old.³²

Patriarchy and whiteness are omnipresent here. The Nubian man highlights the fact that there is a tension between his Cairene wife and his Nubian family, because of the superiority and favorability of whiteness over blackness. While he describes it as jealousy, it is financial security that the women of his family lack. While Zanouba herself is not financially secure, she cannot integrate into the Nubian family, and urges their departure.

In a word, Nubian literature has generated a prototypically resilient female protagonist. The female characters of *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khala Aycha* are integral to understanding how a community disaster mobilizes gender dynamics. It is not the western feminisms of male dominance, female oppression, and patriarchal social structure that are inherent to the Nubian community of Upper Egypt. It is in fact, the Nile River flooding from the Aswan Dam, accelerating the migration of Nubian men into the bigger cities of the North. Even when skin color is mentioned as playing a significant role in gender relations, it is inherently intertwined with the capitalism and greed of the city.

Set from 1931 to 1932, in the Nubian village of Qattah – just one year before the flood of 1933 – *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khala Aycha* are stories of a lost nation, resurrected through Qasim's memories, during his many years in jail. Through his recreation of the incidents, he is not re-imagining his nation. He uses memory as history, as a statement on the status quo, as a harsh critique of the bigger

32 Ibid., 412.

nation-state of Egypt: a nation state that is centered on Cairo and which marginalizes its subjects in the upper regions and Nubian areas. The relationship between men and women in this novel focuses on the injustices of the bigger nation, such as the absence of monetary compensation, and the destruction of the centuries old vital palm tree plantations. The women of *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khala Aycha* are in distress and turmoil because of injustices by government officials. This is the real source of the rupture in the Nubian community.

Conclusion

Literature is a gateway through which readers can venture into the undercurrents: concealed qualities of gender relations, particularly of underrepresented peoples. Nubian literature in Arabic is an exceptional tool for understanding Nubian women and their own autobiographical representations. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the literacy rate in Egypt is about 26.5%; 20% of this group is female.³³ This statistic has led some to assume that illiteracy rate is higher in rural areas, particularly the Nubian villages. That would necessitate the analysis of Nubian women and their dynamics with their male counterparts, in the broader group of all Egyptian women. Certain themes that permeate scholarship on Muslim women – characterizing them as docile, oppressed, non-vocal, passive, and constantly subjected to male domination – are generally the same stereotypes applied to Nubian women residing in rural upper Egypt.

The geographic location of Nubia, and its rural characteristics, add to the difficulty of understanding the inner anxieties, fears, hopes and powers of Nubian women. Today, the Nubian community is concentrated around the cities of Luxor and Aswan in Upper Egypt. The largest displacement of Nubians occurred in 1964 with the building of the Aswan High Dam. This event led to a new awareness of Nubian identity. Thus, the literature of Nubians in Arabic is an avenue through which one can look at this socially and economically marginalized group. This body of literature enhances our understanding of the important influence of economic and social factors on Nubian women and their views of the world. Moreover, it narrates the ways that Nubian women negotiate their space in a marginalized and underrepresented community.

Nubian literature in Arabic focuses on this tragic history of flooding, displacement and re-settlement. In addition, it highlights

33 See the report on the illiteracy rate in Egypt according to CAPMS, released by the news channel MBC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r05nhprvoXU>.

how these incidents affect the daily lives of Nubian women. There is no doubt that rural Nubian women developed a sense of antagonism towards the urban centers of Aswan and Cairo. The forced migration of Nubians disrupted the gender balance, changing relationships and historic social norms, and increased women's domestic daily responsibilities for household, children and education.

Nubian writers, both male and female, represent these issues of survival of rural women. Although marked by the ability to adapt and ultimately survive, rural women continue to seek approval and acknowledgement. Their resentment of "the city" is characterized by an overall loathing of the place that has disrupted their family structure, now extended to the second and third generations. As shown here in *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khala Aycha*, Qasim's description of the rural Nubian woman is one of strength, endurance, and adaptability. Her ability to survive the harshest circumstances is repeatedly the main theme in contemporary literature, and is the personification of this female society, as so poignantly portrayed by both generations. Daria Sakina and Auntie Aycha, in *al-Shamandurah* and *al-Khala Aycha*, are examples of Nubian women's struggle and continuous empowerment. This story is emblematic of the self-empowerment of the Nubian woman. Fighting against the extinction of her ancestors' stories, a strongly holding onto the land, and a resilience against the blending and fusion of her identity are key factors in empowering Nubian communities.

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The Nile Bride Myth “Revisioned” in Nubian Literature

Ghada Abdel Hafeez

1. Introduction

Adrienne Rich coined the term “re-vision,” by which she means “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” to understand “the assumptions in which [women] are drenched.”¹ Sharon Friedman has added another dimension to the term by clarifying that “revision” in the sense of looking back places more emphasis on interpretation, both the contemporary writer’s interpretation of the story/myth he or she is retelling and also the interpretive possibilities opened up for the readers.² Helene Cixous, in addition, has rightfully observed: “All myths have been referred to a masculine interpretation” but when women read them, they “read them differently.”³ My aim in this paper is “revisioning” the Nile Bride myth as retold by two Nubian writers: Yahiya Mukhtar (1963) and Haggag Hassan Oddoul (1944) in their short stories “The Nile Bride” (1990) and “The River People” (1989). In my analysis, I use the critical tools of feminist theorists like Simon de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Helene Cixous, Sharon Friedman, Alicia Ostriker, Mary Daly, and Kate Millett to “look back,” “see with fresh eyes,” and “enter the old myth” with the purpose of unsnarling the hidden patriarchal practices in the writers’ myth-making. My “revisioning” reading also aims at exorcising and challenging the internalized patriarchal manifestations in Mukhtar and Oddoul’s “retellings” that have imprisoned women in their norms and symbolic moral legalities. Finally, in my “different” reading I seek to evaluate the two writers’ “interpretation” of the myth to see to what extent

1 RICH, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, p. 35.

2 Quoted in FOSTER’s “Introduction” to *Dramatic Revisions of Myths*, p. 3.

3 CIXOUS, “The Laugh of Medusa,” p. 156.

they denied their brides' voice and visibility or opened possibilities of self-assertion for them.

2. The Nile Bride myth

Since the dawn of recorded history, the Nile and its inundation have been to all the Nile valley inhabitants their life cord, and the locus of their social, economic, and cultural activities and ceremonies from birth till death. This explains why Hapy,⁴ the Pharaonic Nile god, addressed as the "Father of the Gods,"⁵ held unrivalled position among the gods of ancient Egypt. He was worshipped and feared for his unpredictable powers associated with creation, renewal, and fertility and also with destruction and drought. Pharaohs and commoners paid him lavish honors.⁶ In the Nile cult, the Nile Bride myth or *Arous el Nil* refers to the practice of casting into the Nile/Hapy a beautiful young virgin as a sacrifice⁷ in order to obtain a plentiful inundation, ensure his bounteous yearly coming and avoid his wrath. Among historians and Egyptologists, however, this myth is highly controversial. Many have rejected it vehemently, as they claim there have been neither Pharaonic nor Coptic sources that allude to human sacrifices.⁸ Others postulate the possibility of human sacrifice based on the Hymn to the Nile, which has references to offerings and to a great festival or sacrifice for the river⁹ and the wooden statuettes called "Wives of the Nile" or "concubines of Hapy," which were seen as representation of "human sacrifices in a symbolic form."¹⁰ The origin of the myth can be traced back in the festivals and celebrations of ancient Egyptians to honor the Nile/Hapy. On the night of the 11th of Panoi, June 17th, ancient Egyptians observed an important event, the "Night of the Tear-drop" with reference to a tear shed by the goddess Isis,¹¹ which they believed was the cause of the inundation. During the festival, thousands of miniature figures of Hapy were manufactured in every sort of material, among them gold, silver, copper, lead, turquoise, which, along with seals, pendants and statuettes of his consort Repit, were carried through the towns and villages so all Egyptians might pray to him, after which they were offered to him.¹² This ritual passed on from one generation to another until it was allegedly stopped by the Caliph Omar Ibn Khatab. In the year of the

4 Sometimes spelled Hapi.

5 BUDGE, *The Nile*, p. 195.

6 See MONTE, *Everyday Life in Egypt*, p. 32.

7 BUDGE, *The Nile*, p. 197 and FRAZER, *The Golden Bough*, p. 430.

8 MORGAN, "Bride of the Nile." See also FOUAD's *El-Qahera fi Hayati* [Cairo in My Life], p. 50.

9 MASPERO, *Hymne au Nil*, quoted by MORENZ, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 150.

10 KAKOSY, "The Nile, Euthenia, and the Nymphs," pp. 290, 291, 297. See also MONTE, *Everyday Life in Egypt*, p. 32.

11 See BUDGE, *The Dwellers on the Nile*, p. 106.

12 MONTE, *Everyday Life in Egypt*, p. 32.

conquest of Egypt by the Arabs in 641, Amr Ibn el 'As, the Muslim army general, abolished what he described as a "barbarous custom" of throwing a young virgin to the river. But when the Nile did not rise, the people became afraid that there might be drought and famine. So, he wrote a letter to the Caliph informing him about what he had done. In response to his letter, the Caliph sent him a note and asked him to throw the note in the Nile instead, and it was said that the Nile flooded after that.¹³ If the ritual was allegedly prohibited, both Muslim and Christian Egyptians "kept the great Nile-festival" and also called it *Lelat al-Nuktah* (Night of the Drop), following the ancient Egyptians' belief in the miraculous drop that causes the Nile to rise.¹⁴ This was followed by another celebration also observed by the Egyptians around the middle of August, when the Nile reached the 16th cubit on the Nilometer, and it was also accompanied by singing and dancing and attended by all social classes.¹⁵ Egyptians till today still celebrate the Nile Festival in August of every year, which is now called *Wafa el-Nil* (The Completion or Abundance of the Nile), a spectacular celebration, which aims at raising people's awareness about the intimate bond between the Nile and the Egyptians and the deadly effects of polluting its water. Whether the myth is based on evidence or not and whether there was human sacrifice or not go beyond the scope of this paper. The point of departure here, though, is that the myth of throwing a bride into the river has transcended any historical moments and remained a source of enduring interest and inspiration for writers and poets for thousands of years.

3. The Nubians' Bonding with the Nile

Throughout the centuries, the ancient Egyptian and ancient Nubian civilizations were entwined in a symbiotic relationship. The two lands alternately traded and warred with each other. Egyptian cultural elements spread to Nubia, carried by priests, soldiers, traders, and travelers, whereas Nubian culture was spread to Egypt by Nubians as well as by Egyptian travelers returning from Nubia; in this way, both societies assimilated items of culture from each oth-

13 LANE in his book *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* referred to this note, which states: "From Omar, Prince of the Faithful, to the Nile of Egypt. If thou flow of thine own accord, flow not: but if it be God, the One, the Mighty, who causeth thee to flow, we implore God, the One, the Mighty, to make thee flow" (p. 500). Amr did and the Nile, as we are told, rose.

14 BUDGE, *The Dwellers*, p. 106 and *The Nile*, p. 196, and FOUAD, *El-Qahera*, p. 50.

15 BUDGE also gives detailed description of this celebration, which used to take place at Fum al-Khalig, in Cairo, where a dam was built every year. A conical mound of earth called an *arousa* or "bride," in a clear allusion to the bride that was being sacrificed in ancient days, was always washed away before the cutting of the dam. *The Nile*, p. 197. See also FRAZER, *The Golden Bough*, p. 430.

er.¹⁶ Like the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Nubians worshipped the Nile and “evolved close relations with it.”¹⁷ They also shared with them the same Nile beliefs and ceremonialism.

Oddoul has admitted that the Nubians followed ancient Egyptian religion and “worshipped the Nile,” but “with the conversion to the heavenly religions, they regarded it as one of God’s miracles to be revered and adored.”¹⁸ He even goes further to find affinity between the Nubians and the Nile, describing Nubians as “brothers to this enchanting river.”¹⁹ Moreover, Khalil Qasem emphasizes the same sacred bond between the Nubians and the Nile by saying: “The Nubians see God in the Nile and consequently love and fear him as they worship and dread God.”²⁰

4. Definition of Myth

Before delving deep in “re-visioning” how the two writers retold the Nile Bride myth, light will be shed on the meaning of myth. Myth can be regarded as “a mode of symbolic expression objectifying early human feeling and experience, [...] the product of the reflective or historical consciousness, or of the search for scientific or philosophical truth.”²¹ So, from this definition, it becomes clear that myth combines indigenous thought, the memory of a group with its cosmology and historical and social facts. From a feminist perspective, however, myth is described as “inhospitable terrain,” the medium through which patriarchy perpetuates its ideology through legitimizing certain perspectives of culture, history, and society.²² According to Mary Daly, the myth-makers are able to penetrate women’s “minds/imaginings only by seeing to it that their deceptive myths are acted out over and over again in performances that draw the participants into emotional complicity.”²³ Through this “acting out” and these “performances” both men and women in any given society accept their roles without question. Applying Daly’s logic, in giving the Nile Bride myth reality by acting it out, Egyptian and Nubian women have become “re-producers and ‘living proof’ of the deceptive myth.”²⁴

This is true because the ideology of the myth is transmitted through cultural institutions. Repetition and performance make the

16 JENNINGS, *The Nubians of West Aswan*, pp. 23–24. See also BUDGE, *The Nile*, p. 155.

17 AL-GUINDI, “The Angels in the Nile: A Theme in Nubian Ritual,” in *Nubian Ceremonial Life*, p. 104.

18 ODDOUL, *Nostalgia Nubiyah* [Nubian Nostalgia], p. 5.

19 ODDOUL, *Udaba’ Nubiyun wa Nuqqad ‘Unsurayun* [Nubian Writers and Racist Critics], p. 67.

20 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 68.

21 RAHV, “The Myth and the Powerhouse,” p. 4.

22 OSTRICKER, “The Thieves of Language,” p. 71.

23 DALY, *Gyn/ecology*, p. 109.

24 *Ibid.*

myth and its embedded concepts authentic and undeniable. This explains why in spite of the time and cultural distance, Egyptians in general and Nubians in particular continue their engagement with the Nile Bride myth. Henry A. Murray affirms that in each society, there must be a mythologically instructed community "corpus of images, identities and models" that provide the basic range of metaphorical identity for these societies.²⁵ This is also related to Jung's archetype, which transcends the personal, hence the use of the same motif by different writers in spite of the differences among them. The same idea is echoed by Northrop Frye, who believes that myths "take root in a specific society and provide for the society a network of shared allusion and experience."²⁶ All these suggest the effect of this myth in culture and thinking.

Myths in general, with their stereotyped characters, predictability of events, and implicit didacticism, as Simon de Beauvoir has observed, "justify men's privileges and even authorize their abuse."²⁷ Myth over history has mutilated and muted women's minds and spirits. The Nile Bride myth, in particular, along with the male writers' telling and retelling of it, which Marina Warner sees as "a part of that myth,"²⁸ is embedded with gendered and patriarchal images and points of view. These images and points of view mold women's realities, fix their values, and limit their vision of individual possibilities.²⁹ The Nile Bride myth has been promulgated by patriarchy for its purpose, which is punishing any woman who commits any kind of transgression. The result is keeping women subdued, subordinated, subservient, and silent. The disenfranchisement and silence experienced by all Nile Brides, in different degrees, are shared by women in all patriarchal cultures.

When Mukhtar and Oddoul revisited and retold this culturally-grounded myth, they brought their patriarchal gaze to it,³⁰ which hardly questions gender roles or assumes full humanity for their female protagonists, especially in the case of Mukhtar, who succumbs blindly to the traditional myth. Laura Mulvey has pointed out that the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly.³¹ Farida and Asha, the two Nile Brides analyzed in this paper, in spite of their differences, are "styled according to" their creators' patriarchal assumptions about women, and consequently locate their agency in relation to the gaze

25 MURRAY, *Myth and Mythmaking*, p. 279.

26 FRYE, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature*, p. 19.

27 DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex*, p. 255.

28 WARNER, *Managing Monsters*, p. 13.

29 SHURBUTT, "The Cane River Characters," p. 14.

30 Both Mukhtar and Oddoul belong to the Nubian diaspora, whose parents emigrated to the North after the second rise of the Aswan Dam in 1933. Both also won the State Incentive Award for fiction in 1990 and 1991.

31 MULVEY, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 272.

of their men, whose eyes reflect the same cultural ideals that produce them as victims.

5. The Nile Bride in Literature

Various literary works were modeled, even loosely, on the Nile Bride myth, whose recurrent narrative patterns and symbols become the ground for vestiges that can be traced in contemporary mainstream Egyptian literature, of which Nubian literature written in Arabic is a part.³² Khalid Montaser rightfully asks, "Is the ritual of flinging a maiden in the immortal river still lurking in the Egyptian consciousness?"³³ The answer can be traced not only in the literary works that still celebrate women sacrificing themselves for the sake of pleasing the angry gods of their households but also in the recurrent stories of ordinary women following in the Nile Brides' footsteps. Many Egyptian writers have adopted and adapted this myth to suit their social, political and aesthetic purposes and have expanded its focal image in significant ways, revealing their epistemology and their relationship to gender power relations.

Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) for example, retold this myth in his novel *The Beginning and the End* (1949). Nafisa can be regarded as a contemporary Nile Bride forced by her brother, Hasanayn, an army officer, "to be wed to the Nile" to save his honor and the family's, after she "was arrested in a certain house in Al Sakakini." Now, in Hasanayn's eyes, she has become a mere "filthy prostitute."³⁴ From the patriarchal point of view, Nafisa has to pay for attempting to define herself and for all the sins she committed: being vulnerable to temptation, lustful, deceitful, and for breaking the taboo of female purity.

Yusef al-Qaeed (1944–) has also retold the myth in his novel *The Beloved's Country* (1985), and portrayed the Nile Bride in a more positive way, although the Beloved is not the narrator and is mute throughout the novel. But the Nile Bride in this novel is different in one perspective: she is not flung into the Nile by an angry patriarch. In a counteraction, she commits suicide on two levels of action: the realistic one narrated by a police officer at the end of the novel who testifies, "The Nile has chosen her [...] after the country has denied him a Bride; he chose her in particular because she's the most gorgeous woman on earth," and also on the imaginative level which takes place only in the narrator's mind, when he imagines that he

32 HEGAZY, "Introduction" to OUDDOUL, *Udaba' Nubiyuns*, p. 8, but Oddoul insists in the same book that Nubian literature is distinct and cannot be included under the umbrella term of Arabic literature, p. 28.

33 MONTASER, "Arous el-Nil mn Nafisa ela' Somayia" [The Nile Bride from Nafisa to Somayia].

34 MAHFOUZ, *The Beginning and the End*, pp. 396, 400.

takes her in a boat ride and she loses her balance and falls into the Nile. He says:

He [The Nile] grabbed my beloved from me. It seems that what has been narrated about the Nile Bride is infallible truth and that his request for a Bride every year is proven. The difference is that in the past, they used to bring him the Bride in a spectacular ceremony but what is happening right now is that it is he who seeks a Bride, makes a choice, and seizes her through a new channel – which is drowning.³⁵

Among the Nubian writers who employed this myth to address their own concerns are Mukhtar and Oddoul, who have cleverly interwoven it in the fabric of their works and have thematically presented two contemporary Nile Brides who end up flinging themselves in the Nile for different reasons. In addition, the setting in their two short stories is modern and the action takes place in two Nubian villages: the first in an unknown Nubian village,³⁶ while the second depicts "not the Nubia of ancient history – though it looms in the background – but the Nubia of the not-too-distant past, where the impact of the High Dam is ever present."³⁷ The two short stories blend mythical elements with realism as well. Both are inhabited by mysterious mythical creatures like *Alkaby*, the mythical folklore ogre and the night's devils,³⁸ and "The River People, demon of dry land, genie of the water, and Klow To, the Well Child"³⁹ because the authority of the myth employed has made it easy for the two writers to introduce unique supernatural beings.

But this simple formulation is where the congruence between the two short stories ends: Mukhtar deals with the entire myth, expanding it to encapsulate the details of Farida's painful story narrated by her father, Abdul Rahman, who amalgamates bitter reminiscences of his despondent childhood as a slave with his daughter's rape at the hands of the Umda's son,⁴⁰ and the apathy, disgust, and scorn he received from the villagers for his daughter's "cursed deed"⁴¹ till the last resolution when he decides to kill her, which coincides surpris-

35 AL-QAEED, *Balad el-Mahboub* [The Beloved's Country], pp. 168, 145. All translations are my own.

36 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil: Qass mnal-nouba* [The Nile Bride], asserts in the foreword to his short story: "In this short story, names of tribes and names of people which are common among the Nubian communities and villages are used." He also makes it clear that his intention is authenticating "the Nubian environment." He finally warns us that in case the names mentioned "correspond with any real names of tribes or individuals," it is by mere chance, as "they are not specified in particular" (p. 7). All translations are my own.

37 WOFFENDEN, "Voice from the South."

38 MUKHTAR's *Arous el-Nil*, pp. 14, 15.

39 ODDOUL, *Nights of Musk*, pp. 103, 104.

40 *Umda* is an Arabic word for the chief of the village.

41 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 21.

ingly with her jumping into the Nile. Oddoul, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on and glorifies the last moment of the myth/story in which Asha Ashry, defeated in the real world after the drowning/suicide of Siyam, her childhood sweetheart, on his return after years of servitude in the diaspora, takes refuge in the world of her dreams and responds to the calling of the River People. So, Oddoul has given the myth new implications by remodeling the motive of his Bride's suicide.

To use E.W. Herd's tools of myth criticism, Mukhtar's short story is an avowed retelling of an acknowledged myth.⁴² This is achieved through the use of the power of naming – the titles of the myth/ the short story are the same: *Arous el-Nil* or the Nile Bride – and through the plot, which has the same outline as the Nile Bride myth on which it is based. Oddoul's situation, however, is different: in his case we can trace "literary allusion" which attracts the attention of the reader through "illustration or parallel."⁴³ He never admits that he is rewriting the Nile Bride myth, but this should not worry the critic, whose concern is not with the intentions of the author but with how the author weaves the myth to become an integral structure of the work, and includes a multitude of analogies and metaphors arranged in a manner which is not haphazard.⁴⁴ This is achieved through the journey of his protagonist Asha who drowns herself in the Nile. Oddoul has blended the myth with the Nubian myth of the River people,⁴⁵ and transformed it into a new expression of his *Nubianness*.

As for the two modern Nile Brides as a reflection of their writers' engagement with the myth, Farida and Asha vary in the degree to which they are denied voice and visibility, but they also prove what Helen Cixous has concluded that "writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy" where "woman has never [had] her turn to speak."⁴⁶

42 HERD, "Myth Criticism: Limitations and Possibilities," p. 174.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 175.

45 Nubians believe that there are people under the river living in communities, and they have their palaces and waterwheels. They also believe that sometimes the surface of the Nile would open for human beings to go and spend some time with the river people. See SHARAWI, *Al Kurafa wa-al Ustutra* [Superstitions and the Myth], p. 111. See also KENNEDY, "Nubia: History and Religious Background," p. 17. The River people can be an example of the direct impact of the ancient Egyptian religion on the Nubians' belief system. The ancient Egyptians believed that a number of supernatural beings had a close relation to the Nile or inhabited it; sometimes they were portrayed as "a man of the river" or the "women of the river" and sometimes as frightening spirits. For more on this, see KAKOSY, "The Nile, Euthenia, and the Nymphs," p. 294. ODDOUL also admits in *Udaba' Nubiyun* that all 38 books written by Nubian writers revolve around the Nile and the creatures that inhabit it (p. 67).

46 CIXOUS, "The Laugh," p. 249.

6. Mukhtar's Silenced/Invisible Bride

Mukhtar's narrative mode is appropriate to his concern with the details of the myth. And at the same time, it reflects "the sociological" attitude toward the myth,⁴⁷ which is firmly grounded in the social realist tradition of poverty and injustice that engulf the unnamed Nubian village. Thus, the short story opens with a detailed description of the natural setting in which we can see the Nile "already brimful, with the dark, fast-moving flood water overflowing its banks,"⁴⁸ and listen to the croak of frogs and the nervous beatings of the oars, in addition to the heart-wrenching details of Farida's rape that heaps all the misery upon her head and her father's, and eventually leads to her slaughter at the altar of honor.

In this retelling of the myth, the Bride is an object to be described rather than a speaking subject. The father's point of view dominates the narrative, leaving marginal space for Farida's. The third-person, omniscient narrator puts the father's perspective center stage and condemns Farida. The narrator admits: "Farida's crime is of magnitude and she has to be punished."⁴⁹ Although a third-person narrator is supposed to be "objective," "the impersonal, omniscient [narrator] [...] will make choices which are guided by judgments [...] structured by a set of attitudes, interests and prejudices."⁵⁰ So, from the beginning, the narrator "makes choices" and establishes Farida's position as a sinful culprit, and this helps the father turn her invisible, and it also facilitates "negating of [her] vibrating impulse, stripping her utterly of existence, pulsation, life, and memory, till she has become a mere name."⁵¹ As Daly proclaims, "It's hard to see/name the fact that phallocracy reduces women to framed pictures/holograms/robots." Then she adds, "the see-ing, nam-ing of this nonbeing is essential to liv-ing."⁵² Because his daughter has been turned into "nonbeing,"⁵³ it has not been difficult for him to reach the resolution of killing her. Of course, the narrator gives highly persuasive details in an effort to convince us of the father's right to execute the action: firstly, the graphic description of how he and his wife have become "fugitives," rejected by all villagers, followed by "spits and dogs' barking."⁵⁴ Secondly, he is haunted by the horrific image of the Umda's son "preying on her,"⁵⁵ which "stabs his soul like

47 VICKERY, *Myths and Texts*, p. 30.

48 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 14.

49 Ibid., p. 27.

50 BARWELL, "Feminine Perspectives and Narrative Points of View," p. 68.

51 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 18.

52 Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, p. 56.

53 Ibid.

54 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, pp. 18–19.

55 Ibid., p. 19.

a dagger.”⁵⁶ Thirdly, the burning of his skinny goat and of the hut he built after his master had freed him from his long slavery. The burning of his humble hut has become like “the sharp sickle” that “has pulled out the roots of his life and existence.”⁵⁷ Even “Heaven” has been in the conspiracy against his daughter and his prayers and offerings to the two Sheiks Sidi Abdullah and Sidi Kabeer have not been accepted. Finally, he adds one last excuse, which is that killing her is “his revenge from them.”⁵⁸

On the other hand, Farida’s point of view is fragmented and subordinated to her father’s predominant one. When we first see her, she is alone, with her father, on the boat, scared to death, engulfed by “night, darkness, the river, the tranquil stillness which stirs in her soul terror waves, spinning her in an insane whirlpool.”⁵⁹ And the only scene in which she is the main player is the horrific one, the culmination and embodiment of her subjugation and oppression, the scene of forced brutal abortion. We see her dragged by her mother till they reach the Parlor of Hassan Tid, where old women are sitting, staring at her, and their eyes have become like claws “laying her flesh bare, devouring it, and tearing it into pieces.”⁶⁰ Then the narrator shares with us more painful details:

The slave girl Gebaya Marsilia snatched her left arm, so she collapsed...they crawled to her ... dozens of hands ... scores of them ... they removed her dress ... forcibly opened her legs ... the harsh boney fingers went deep in her flesh ... they tore her underpants ... her tongue became like a piece of dry wood in her throat ... her body was permissible to all fingers ... Gebaya’s hand sneaked to her belly ... touching her ... she murmured ... three months ... she cursed her father and mother ... Her fingers like fiery pliers began squeezing her womb ... as if burning skewers penetrated her insides ... they carried her and turned her upside down ... Gebaya stood still on her back ... then they turned her and the slave girl’s hands sneaked again between her thighs ... blood poured hot ... sweat covered her whole body ... everything was enveloped by darkness ... no longer could she see anything.⁶¹

The narrative provides no details about how the Umda’s son seduces Farida, whether she was a willing and active participant in the affair or not, or the number of times they met. The only reference to this affair is Farida’s reminiscences of her friends Zainab and Awada,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 16.

who "envied her for the Umda's son interest in her and his constant chase."⁶² In spite of the gaps, which help magnify the father's point of view and diminish hers, it can be concluded that the Umda's son has abused his superior position and control to reach his goal. For him, sexuality and power are associated, equating his pleasure with the pain and humiliation of Farida along with her family, who in his eyes are nothing but mere objects.

Even her father has become an instrument manipulated by the hands of the patriarchy to which he himself adheres by not only turning his daughter into a "nonbeing"⁶³ but also accepting their decree of abortion. He wrongly thinks that acting as their agent and conforming to their decree might please the Umda and the elders of the village, not knowing that it is his former master, Sheik Shahin Tamush, who was the one behind the idea "of aborting that embryo from the profane womb"⁶⁴ for his own materialistic benefit so as not to lose "Abdul Rahman's strong and unpaid hand."⁶⁵

Farida's father forgets that his status and class in this community equal zero. The power relations in the Nubian community are overtly displayed and flagrantly enunciated. Oddoul has shed light on the rigid class system and the social stratification in the Nubian villages, which make the class to which Farida's parents belong, as ex-slaves, "socially humiliated and sexually vulnerable."⁶⁶ Instead of penalizing the rapist, and supporting the victim, the whole village conspires against the helpless girl and her powerless father. This legitimizing of the rape exposes "the case of injustice which possesses the Nubian village,"⁶⁷ which lays bare the predicament of the poor.

Now, in my Re-visioning reading, the question I would like to pose is why we should blame the victim. Why describe what happened as Farida's "cursed action"?⁶⁸ As the narrative mentions, she was "chased by the Umda's son,"⁶⁹ "devoured by him,"⁷⁰ raped, impregnated, and forced to have an abortion so as not to have a baby from the Umda's son. For the villagers in general and the Umda in particular, this is not enough to erase the "stigma" which *he* felt for combining his son's name with Farida's! "That's why he ordered his guards to burn their hut in the same day in which Farida was forced to abort."⁷¹ Kate Millet has commented on cross-class adultery by saying it is the lower-class woman who is convicted of sexual

62 Ibid., p. 30.

63 Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, p. 56.

64 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 21.

65 Ibid.

66 ODDOUL, *Al Marawa wa el Gens* [Women and Sexuality], p. 17.

67 Ibid., p. 15.

68 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 21.

69 Ibid., p. 30.

70 Ibid., p. 19.

71 Ibid., p. 27.

adultery (and for violating taboos of class and sexuality), while the upper-strata male culprit goes unpunished.⁷²

Victimized by her rapist, his family, by tradition, and by her own father, Farida starts regarding herself as a culprit, although she has not transgressed any patriarchal confines of sexual inactivity or honor. Her oppressors force her to characterize her actions by their definitions, and so she changes into a mere thing. This "thing," the "nonbeing,"⁷³ is forced to be silent and invisible without "full access to language"⁷⁴ and without authoritative expression. To use Daly's terms, she has become "male-identified, male possessed brains/spirits."⁷⁵ She now sees, like all villagers and her father that, the only way out for her and for her family is accepting the death penalty. The death of the Nile Bride is not only predicted but expected and highly appreciated by the community.

So, if in the original myth, the maiden was forced to be wed to the Nile to ensure its yearly coming, Mukhtar's male-made Nile Bride, through this dehumanizing brainwashing, accepts the same fate but for a different reason, which is "to redeem her father, [and] ease the pain that torments him."⁷⁶ The use of the active voice suggests Farida's willingness to perform this ritual and to be an agent of her own destruction. Now the scene is set for her to reproduce the Nile Bride myth by determining to "fling herself in the Nile."⁷⁷ In so doing, she can ease her father's conscience, so that he might stop regarding himself as a murderer. In addition, the villagers will raise her from a state of sin to one of grace and her parents will emerge from an unfavorable state to a more acceptable one. In this way, the whole village will be purified of the *sinful/evil/rebellious* Farida who challenges the social and class hierarchy by having a relationship with the Umda's son.

Farida's decision proves what Gilbert Highet has stated, that all writers "are good psychologists" as they "discover new yet credible motives for the actions recorded in mythical tradition."⁷⁸ The minute she stands up to execute the action, "a mysterious power throws her in the Nile" and eventually she "was swallowed by the river."⁷⁹ As Oddoul states, "She has been turned into a Nile Bride; even though she is not a virgin as her virginity was deflowered slyly and forcibly."⁸⁰

72 MILLET, *Sexual Politics*, p. 43.

73 DALY, *Gyn/ecology*, p. 56.

74 LANDY, "The Silent Woman," p. 19.

75 DALY, *Gyn/ecology*, p. 57.

76 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 30.

77 Ibid., p. 31.

78 HIGHET, *The Classical Tradition*, pp. 535-536.

79 MUKHTAR, *Arous el-Nil*, p. 31.

80 ODDOUL, "Women," p. 15.

This scene magnifies women's subordination to the superstructure of male domination, which includes Farida's denial of life to preserve the honor of her family. In this scene of murder/suicide, Farida is confined and denied an identity of her own and the right to authorship. She is subjected to the worst of the patriarchal sins, which is invisibility and erasure.

My re-visioning reading has exposed how this short story camouflages reality and creates a cultural mindscape that subjugates women through legitimizing the masculine value system. In this light, Farida, as an incarnation of the Nile Bride, "cannot speak," to echo Spivak's famous question, "can the subaltern speak?"⁸¹ because her muteness results from her inability to find a language capable of articulating her suffering, needs or hopes, since she has been systematically denied expressive freedom. The present text of oppression hardly provides such a language because it positions her as mute by claiming to speak for her.

My re-visioning analysis of the re-enactment of the Nile Bride patriarchal myth in Mukhtar's short story has unmasked his blind adherence to patriarchal ideology and authority, which perpetuates the same negative myth that has entrapped women in the web of silence/erasure.

7. Oddoul's Ambivalent Nile Bride

If Mukhtar blindly follows the Nile Bride myth both thematically and technically and consolidates the myth of the woman as victim, Oddoul has only kept the mytheme of the traditional story – the drowning of the main protagonist Asha in the Nile – but reconstructed it by weaving in its fabric the Nubian myth of the River People. In so doing he reexamined the representation of gender and gender roles and adapted them to new social and aesthetic purposes. In other words, he invented a new mythical structure that maintains its resemblance to the Nile Bride myth but at the same time has kept an inextricable connection with the primordial ancient Nubian roots.

For Oddoul, his short story "The River People" is not only a re-writing and reconstructing of a syncretized version of the Nile Bride myth but also a rewriting of Nubian history. The Nubians endured four successive waves of uprootedness, displacement and resettlement in 1902, 1912, 1933, and finally in 1964 with the construction of the Aswan Dam and the High Dam, which Oddoul describes as "crimes against humanity."⁸² While the High Dam symbolizes one of Egypt's modern miracles, the sacrifices of the Nubians were ob-

81 SPIVAK, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" p. 66.

82 KHALLAF, "Right of Return."

scured and overshadowed by the national, mainstream narrative. Consequently, as Anthony Calderbank argues, “the tragedy suffered by the Nubian people as a result of the construction of the High Dam at Aswan is one of the great untold stories of the twentieth century.”⁸³ What aggravates their situation is the historical failure of successive governments to fulfill their promises, the non-recognition and the amnesia of the Egyptians, and denial of their right to return to their home territories. Oddoul, a vocal defendant and activist of Nubian rights, sees in Nubian literature an outlet for this tragedy and a documentation of a rich culture on the verge of extinction.

Oddoul adopts the oral tradition in his narrative, reflected in both the setting and structure, which “vividly conjure up the sights and sounds of Nubia.”⁸⁴ As for the setting, it is not a mute background, but it is actively and intricately interwoven with the spatial practices of the people. The human/land interconnectedness functions not only as mere setting but as vibrant character. The setting is realistic, trimmed with Nubian geographic and cultural elements like the Nile and the green palm trees, but his realistic mode of representation is grounded in his unshakable belief in the mythical dimension of the Nile and its creatures. As he maintains:

I still believe in stories about the Nile’s creatures. My own parents believed that there were evil beings called Amoun Dugur living there. Such stories were inherent in their daily lives. My parents used to throw pieces of bread into the Nile to appease these evil beings. They never ate any fish, nor did they throw any waste into the Nile.⁸⁵

In addition to the intimate relationship with the Nile, there are also references to the palm trees, which represent another major element in any Nubian context. The very first page of the short story sets the scene for the centrality of this environmental element in the lives of Nubians. In the description of the setting, references are made to palm trees as lovers; this image represents the two lovers Asha Ashry and Siyam. As Oddoul comments: “The two palm tree lovers stand for Asha and Siyam, her childhood sweetheart, and how Siyam’s long travel leads to Asha’s tragic downfall, as she is leaning on him.”⁸⁶ Asha has seen herself and Siyam as “a medium one leaning against a tall one, like a young woman resting her head on the chest of her tall, young man. I said the shorter one was me, Asha

83 CALDERBANK, “Translator’s Note,” to ODDOUL’S *Nights of Musk*, p. vii.

84 Ibid.

85 AMIN, “I have a dream.”

86 ODDOUL, *Udaba’ Nubiyun*, p. 71.

Ashry, and the tall one was you, Siyam. The two palm tree lovers ... just like you and me."⁸⁷ So, from the outset of the short story, Asha establishes herself in direct relation to the natural surroundings.

The structure of the short story is dynamic because of its inextricable relation to oral tradition. Oddoul favors the cyclic plot structure and not the linear one. The beginning of the short story reverberates with mythical force and mystery, which establishes both the cyclic structure and the mythical nature of the narrative in which the distinction between Asha Ashry, the main protagonist and main narrator, and that of her great aunt, also named Asha Ashry, are blurred and the distinctions between reality and myth, conscious knowledge and unconscious desire are dissolved as well.

The beginning of the short story foregrounds the doubling between the life and death of the two Ashas. Years ago, the great aunt Asha disappeared mysteriously but her sister, Korty, "insisted that her sister had gone to the River People" and prophesized, "But she'll come back, she will come back."⁸⁸ Years later, her prophecy came true when her daughter gave birth to another Asha. It is here that Korty exclaims, "Asha, Asha, Asha has returned."⁸⁹

The same mythical/magical atmosphere is maintained by the cautionary warnings of the grandmother to young Asha: "Beware ... Don't stick too close to the river. Don't wander along the bank at the time of the flood Don't go down there on your own."⁹⁰ These warnings are a clear message to young Asha to resist the irresistible attraction of the Nile and its creatures, which for the grandmother equals trouble. Yet the grandmother's cautionary warnings sound unconvincing to young Asha, who seems more resolute than her aunt to explore the unknown because the knowledge she gains is fundamental to her development and empowerment.

When we first meet young Asha Ashry, which means "beautiful" in Nubian, we know that she is destined to follow the footsteps of her great aunt. Through their intimate connection and bonding to the natural rhythm of the cosmos, both have become different and more defiant of patriarchal constraints. Young Asha has learnt from the lesson of her great aunt, who was "locked up in the house in compliance with the elders' ruling" and consequently was forbidden from "sitting on the bank of the river to look at the clear waters and whisper secrets to its people." Gradually, late Asha withered and "suffocated between the walls"⁹¹ and finally when one day the whole village was attending a wedding, she sneaked out of the house and

87 Oddoul, *Nights of Musk*, p. 93.

88 Ibid., p. 89.

89 Ibid., p. 93.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., p. 92.

vanished. Young Asha has become more defiant against the mutilation and muting of patriarchy and endeavors to restore an intimate relation with nature and the cosmos.

Like her great aunt, she violates the boundary between the natural and supernatural and evolves close and intimate spiritual relations with the river creatures: the fish, the perch, and the River People. One day, as she recalls, "I was still young. I waited till the fisherman wasn't looking, then I grabbed his laden basket and threw the poor fish back into the hamboul." She later confesses, "It wasn't the first time I'd rescued tormented fish from his basket prison."⁹² With all the ridicule and sarcasm she receives for caring about the fish, and the kids' merciless taunting that she is "in love with the fish and the River People,"⁹³ Asha not only brags about her passion for the Nile and its creatures but also has unshakable belief in their magical powers, as she admits, "The fool wouldn't understand the lesson. They didn't learn anything from what happened to the fisherman. The River People punished him [the fisherman]. He had a daughter with a harelip."⁹⁴ As a sign of the supernatural relationship with the river beings, they have "taught her how to dance their dance the correct way."⁹⁵ As an active believer in their powers, she feels so secured under their protection that unlike all the villagers, she is not "afraid of the demon of the dry land [...] [or] the genie of the water."⁹⁶ Her difference from the rest of villagers is established and highlighted early.

By endowing his protagonist with vitality, power and agency not given to any Nile Bride before, Oddoul is not only strengthening and empowering Asha but also his readers. Asha is given a wide field of action, elevating her from the stereotypical level of the passive Nile Bride to an active person who challenges traditions, decides for herself, and demands her rights in a male-dominated society. For example, in spite of her unrivalled beauty, which she inherited from her great aunt, the daughter of a Turkish governor and a Nubian woman, "a blend of milk and molasses,"⁹⁷ she turns down marriage proposals and disobeys her parents and the elders of the village and waits for years for Siyam, whom she describes as "my heart's desire [and] my true love incarnated,"⁹⁸ who travels to Alexandria after the building of the High Dam. In her monologue, she confesses: "Nothing could keep me apart from you, no word of admonition that we were too old to be playing together, nor the gossip of the old women

⁹² Ibid., p. 90.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 99.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

who sit by the wall, nor the stern censure of my uncles ... not even my father's violent slaps."⁹⁹ So, we are presented here with a strong-willed young woman who breaks women's enslavement. Even when her mother tries to appeal to her logic by saying, "Asha! You are trying my patience. Siyam has been away a long time. Your father and your uncles are saying that you'll bring us nothing but trouble,"¹⁰⁰ she gives her a deaf ear. Even the passage of years, the marriage of all her peers, the emergence of a younger generation of girls, the rumors about Siyam's infidelity with a Greek maid, all these have not made her give up on Siyam. In this way, Asha Ashry becomes more capable of breaking the silence and challenging some of the patriarchal assumptions about women, which shape women's realities and limit their vision of individual possibilities.

After Asha waits patiently for years for his safe arrival, Siyam, in spite of his ailing, decides to return back and marry his beloved. But unfortunately, when the mail boat he is riding sinks, he drowns/commits suicide in the Nile "with some will on his side."¹⁰¹ As one of his trip companions explains, "Siyam did not help us to rescue him.... He sank to the bottom as if resigned to his watery fate."¹⁰²

The question here is why he submitted to "watery fate." My interpretation lies in Oddoul's transformation of the climax of the ritualistic mythic moment into a new signifier to meet requirements of both mythological and psychological plausibility. Through Siyam's suicide, Oddoul gives us new implications and explains the facts but in a new way. He remodels the traditional mythic paradigm through adding the psychological inner conflict that has been taking place inside Siyam. He has grown up in a traditional community, with steadfast religious, moral and cultural beliefs and social norms, but the prolonged crisis of his voluntary migration to the North and being away from Nubia for years represent a kind of discontinuity or rupture that facilitates his accommodation to different cultural practices. This eventually leads to drastic change in thought and behavior, specifically the adulterous relationship with the Greek maid, drinking alcohol, and not fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.¹⁰³ As a Nubian, Siyam knows deep inside him that these sins – which are violations of religious and social prohibitions – pollute him and "that pollution means possible infestation with evil spirits"¹⁰⁴ and it is only through the Nile water – with the help of the good spirits of the Nile – that he can dispel them.¹⁰⁵

99 Ibid., p. 90.

100 Ibid., p. 95.

101 ODDOUL, *Hadduta Nubia* [A Nubian Folktale], pp. 20–21.

102 ODDOUL, *Nights of Musk*, p. 111.

103 Ibid., p. 104.

104 For more on pollution and ritual cleansing see KENNEDY, "Mushahara," pp. 130, 131.

105 Ibid., p. 132.

When the boat sinks, there was a possibility for him to rescue himself, especially since he was known as “the river swimmer,”¹⁰⁶ but being in the midst of the Nile, he felt nostalgic for his pre-departure purity. His ritual use of the river symbolizes for him his oneness with the Nile. His suicide can be read as his final engagement with the Nile to be cleansed from his sins. It also reflects his inviolable belief in the spiritual world under the Nile. So, to atone for his sins and to compensate Asha for the years he has forsaken her, he decides to wait for her with the River People. It can also be seen as harsh punishment with a moralistically appropriate closure. So, as in the case of Nafisa and Farida who were sacrificed for the sake of the honor of their families, Siyam’s drowning in the Nile can also convey the same “perennial struggle between inner demand and external necessity.”¹⁰⁷

In Oddoul’s rewriting of the Nile Bride myth, he departs from the traditional model by reconstructing not only the female and male figures but also by giving them new motives to emphasize the infinite complexity of human life. If in the traditional myth, it is always a female figure that is being sacrificed either as a punishment or a gift to please an angry patriarch, here through the amalgam of the Nile Bride myth with the River people myth, Oddoul has struck a balance between the genders.

With all the motives behind Siyam’s suicide, Asha is momentarily disempowered. In her grief and disbelief, she denies Siyam’s death and refuses to cry, and bursts out not only “laughing” but also “dance[ing] the perch dance at the funeral.”¹⁰⁸ Then she runs off to everything that reminds her of Siyam, first to the “palm tree lovers [and] embraced the slender male tree [She] embraced him until his barbed scales dug into [her] flesh.”¹⁰⁹ Her embrace was so fierce that the villagers “had to tear [her] away.”¹¹⁰ Then, she runs to the Nile and its people, assuring herself that he must be with “the River People where every pleasurable delight is seen and heard.”¹¹¹

Time passes and people forget about her tragedy, and the weddings begin once more. Feeling completely abandoned, she cries for the first time since his drowning. She rushes to the river, to be shocked by “the drowning of the valley” which has been “eaten up by the flood.”¹¹² In a moment of epiphany, Asha sees “the lid was taken off the river, the translucent sheet removed” and she hears

106 ODDOUL, *Nights of the Musk*, p. 113.

107 FEDER, “Myth, Poetry, and Critical Theory,” p. 52.

108 ODDOUL, *Nights of the Musk*, p. 113.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., p. 115

"The River People ... calling ... and Anna Asha ... and Siyam."¹¹³ It is at this moment that she decides to drown herself. So, she hurries to her grandmother's house, pulls "the disk of the Almighty," which she "hung on the middle of [her] forehead" and then she laughs with joy: "Tonight I will be married to proud Siyam."¹¹⁴ In addition, she takes the sword off the wall and sang, "Raise your sword, O groom. Raise up your sword for your guests."¹¹⁵ She flees to the river, singing, laughing, weeping, holding the sword in hand, with "the gold jingle-jangled" and drowns amid the frogs' croaking, the crickets' chirpings, her mother's heart-wrenching screams and shrieks, and her grandmother's wailings, assuring them while "smearing the silt on her head" that "Asha Ashry has gone to the River People."¹¹⁶

So, with all her relentless attempts to free herself from patriarchal shackles, the ritual ceremony of her suicide that starts with donning the accouterments of Nubian nuptials and dressing herself up as a bride for her wedding/death by her drowning or "going to the River People" establishes the masculine rule over her conscious life. In my Re-visioning reading, I see that this represents a relapse in Oddoul's liberating experiment, although he denies it. He regards her willing "steps into the depths of the Nile" as a "return to the re/source for renewal as her great aunt, late Asha Ashry, did."¹¹⁷ That might be true in the case of her great aunt who returns or who is resurrected in young Asha. But I read the willing and voluntary drowning of both Siyam and Asha as a descent into the unknown, which carries with it the risk of annihilation. It does not guarantee rebirth, as Oddoul suggests. On the contrary, it carries a very pessimistic message, a death knell, which Hala Halim has read as "a metaphor for the trauma of Nubia's drowning"¹¹⁸ and might be a reference to the disappearance of the Nubian culture.

Asha's final decision exposes Oddoul's ambivalence. Throughout the narrative, Asha prides herself in her vocal resistance to the patriarchal institution but now we know that her resistance might have been triggered and kindled by her romantic attachment to her fiancée and the feeble dream inside her that they can be reunited one day and live happily ever after in their familiar surroundings. But his death, along with the disappearance of their land under the lake, and the indifference of the villagers, make her reach the disturbing but transformative realization that without Siyam and without her natural habitat, she is just a "nonbeing"¹¹⁹ like Farida.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., p. 116

115 Ibid., p. 116

116 Ibid., p. 119

117 ODDOUL, *Hadduta Nubia*, p. 23.

118 HALIM, "Nubian Salvage."

119 DALY, *Gyn/ecology*, p. 56.

She has become a “willing victim”¹²⁰ and her willingness transforms her into a man-made construct. To use Daly’s words, Oddoul in this way can be described as a re-producer and “living proof” of this deceptive myth.

In my Re-visioning reading, Asha’s suicide in the Nile elucidates the patriarchal taking over of Oddoul’s Nile Bride. By choosing to commit suicide in the Nile, Asha like Farida, Nafisa and the Beloved, have totally imbibed the patriarchal ideologies that shape their existence and their death. Farida seeks suicide in the Nile compulsively, as an escape from the trauma of “nonbeing,” invisibility and muteness; Asha too reaches the same destiny after being fragmented and her life force devitalized.

8. Conclusion

The writers’ variations in their retelling of the Nile Bride myth, in their techniques and symbolic action, are the products of their attitudes toward the myth. Mukhtar presents the typical patriarchal image of the Bride who is punished for breaking the image of the self-sacrificing, complaisant, pure female imposed upon the society. Oddoul has taken big strides in the rewriting and replacing the old myth by reconstructing both Siyam and Asha and by presenting Asha as one who ventures into the discovery of her own identity, but unfortunately she is defeated and relapsed into a context similar to Farida’s. So, eventually, both Mukhtar and Oddoul – to different degrees – perpetuate the same oppressive myth. This echoes what Gilbert Highet declares that writers chose myths for their subjects because “the myths are permanent”, while “problems do not change, because men and women do not change.”¹²¹

I would like to conclude by saying that without facing the ills that have been done to women by the patriarchal telling, retelling, and revisiting of myths, women will remain mute, invisible and disempowered. Both men and women writers and critics alike need to cease perpetuating the myth of the voiceless woman whose only way out of a male-dominated society is through suicide—throwing herself literally or figuratively into the river. Both should step outside “the modern canonical core,”¹²² seize the patriarchal myths and rewrite them with a completely different orientation. Not only can they subvert the ideologies of gender, but also construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct offered gender roles. In this way both male

120 BACCHILEGA, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, p. 122.

121 HIGHET, *The Classical Tradition*, p. 540.

122 SHIPPEY, “Rewriting the Core,” in *A Companion to the Fairy Tale*, p. 264.

and female writers can rewrite, unwrite, and replace the male-authored constructions of femininity.¹²³

When myths are boldly transformed, they can be therapeutic in nature to heal wounds and pains inflicted upon the female psyche for thousands of years. They can also be exploratory to enable women to discover hidden capabilities and talents and unfold the experience of emerging female self and multiple identities. In addition, they can postulate more assertive and active protagonists, more feminist versions as role models than the passive Nile Bride. These are inevitable steps if we want to start shaping our thoughts and actions.

123 KNOEFLMACHER, *Victorians, Fairy Tales, and, Femininity*, p. 426.

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Aspects of Gender in Dongolawi and Kenzi Nubian Wise Sayings and Proverbs

Marcus Jaeger

This paper presents insights into gender issues among the Dongolawi and Kenzi Nubians, and specifically Dongolawi and Kenzi Nubian women's lives, as provided by their proverbs and sayings, touching on related areas where helpful.¹ At the time of writing (May 2017) the corpus consists of nearly 300 wise sayings and proverbs in the Dongolawi language, and nearly 350 wise sayings and proverbs in the Kenzi language, with some of them occurring in both.

Dongolawi and Kenzi are two related Nubian languages spoken in the Nile valley of northern Sudan and southern Egypt. The speak-

1 I want to thank the following Dongolawi speakers who presented me with wise sayings and proverbs relating to gender: 'Abd al-Raūf (Old Dongola), Aḥmad Hamza (Lebeb), Aḥmad Sāti (Buunaarti), El-Shafie El-Guzuuli (Khannaag), Muḥammad Ḥasan (Tura'), Sāmi 'Abdallah (Aartigaasha), Shawqi 'Abd al-'Aziz (Haminaarti). Some further Dongolawi speakers helped me to correct hearing and writing the proverbs, and understand their meanings: 'Abd al-Qādir Samiltood, al-Sir 'Abd al-Jalil, Faḡīri Muḥammad, Ibrāhīm Muḥammad, Idrīs Aḥmad, Kamāl Hisayn, Mu'amr al-Fil, family of the late Maḥmūd Sa'id Maḥmūd Sāti, Muḥammad Sharif, Samīra al-Malik. Amna Muṣṭafa and her relatives (Binna) were also very active in collecting Dongolawi proverbs. I want to thank the following Kenzi speakers who presented me with wise sayings and proverbs relating to gender: Wife and sister of 'Abd al-Qādir 'Abd al-Raūf (Dakke), female relatives of the late 'Az Aldin Qāsim (Dabood), 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Ḥāsim (Dakke), Faṭḥi 'Abd al-Sayid (Dakke), Khālīd Karār (Siyaala), Muḥammad Ṣubḥi (Elephantine Island), Ramaḍān Muḥammad (Allaqa), from Sa'id Zāki (Awaad Island), Sayid al-Ḥasan (Aniiba), Umm 'Umar Ḥasan (Dabood). Some further Kenzi speakers helped me to correct hearing and writing the proverbs, and understand their meanings: 'Abd al-Hakīm 'Abdu, 'Abd al-Raḥman 'Awaḍ, Aḥmad 'Uthmān Ḥasan, 'Ali Aḥmad, wife of 'Amm Salī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bāsīt, the late Maḥmūd Muḥammad, the late Muḥammad Gum'a, Muḥammad Jabāli, Muṣṭafa Rabi', Thābit Zāki, 'Umar Ḥasan. Also very active in collecting Kenzi proverbs were the female relatives of 'Abd al-Qādir 'Abd al-Raūf (Dakke), 'Adīla Sulaymān (Dehmiit), 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rāziq (Jebel Togoog), Hajja 'Atiāt Ṣābr and her lady friends (Dabood), Khayria Mūsa (Maharraqa). While not a Kenzi Nubian, yet a good Kenzi speaker, Dr Armgard Goo-Grauer provided further input in correcting and analysing the Kenzi proverbs on gender. And last but not least, during the process of writing the paper Anne Jennings provided most valuable support in all its stages, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban peer-reviewed an earlier version, Derek Cheeseman corrected English spelling and grammar of an earlier version, and Giovanni Ruffini did a thorough job of editing. I want to thank all of them.

ers name their languages Andaandi² and Mattokki.³ Genetically the Nubian languages are classified as members of the Eastern Sudanic subgroup of the Nilo-Saharan phylum, along with other Nubian languages located in the Nuba Mountains and in Darfur (both Western Sudan). Dongolawi and Kenzi speakers are shifting towards Arabic with restricted or no intergenerational language transmission. Their proverbs are even more endangered and many speakers, especially younger ones, do not remember them.

Some wise sayings and proverbs were provided by Nubians as a list or even in published form.⁴ I worked on orthography,⁵ determined meaning, and usage. Other proverbs were collected from individual speakers, especially while regularly visiting the respective language areas in Dongola and Aswan/Kom Ombo since 2009 where I became well known. When remembering a proverb or understanding its meaning many Kenzi and Dongolawi speakers were most willing to pass it on. During informal visits the speakers frequently initiated a discussion about proverbs.

Nubian culture and wisdom are presented as they are perceived by speakers who are usually above 40 years of age and at least theoretically respect their Nubian culture and values. Non-mother tongue speakers, who nowadays form the majority of the Dongolawi and Kenuzi, are nearly always excluded. Generalizing, I may classify my collaborators as culturally “conservative” and above average in terms of formal and informal education. Religiously they represent the whole spectrum from agnostic to very conservative Muslims. These orientations need to be considered when interpreting the proverbs and their meanings as provided by the speakers.

The speakers were aware that their proverbs and further insights were to be presented at conferences outside of Nubia and published. They even encouraged it. That will have been reflected in their answers. However, after knowing most of them for an extended period, I may assume that for most of them strategic considerations were not in the foreground even with a topic as sensitive as gender. Some of the speakers involved are known for their especially direct answers. At one place a speaker was reprimanded by another

2 “Dongolawi” is a term used by outsiders, and by insiders when speaking in Arabic. The language name “Andaandi” means “which belongs to us.” There is no insider term for the people group itself. “Oshkir” is an outsider term applied by Nobiin speakers. I use the term “Dongolawi,” as in other academic papers.

3 “Kenuzi” or “Kenuz” as an ethnic group and “Kenzi” as a language name are terms used by outsiders, and by insiders when talking in Arabic. When speaking in Kenzi both the language and the ethnic group are designated as “Mattokki,” with different interpretations of the term. In order to stay consistent with the term “Dongolawi” I use the terms “Kenuzi” for the speakers and “Kenzi” for the language.

4 Especially HĀMID KHABĪR AL-SHAIKH, *Nubian Wisdom and Proverbs from Dongola*.

5 Based on EL GUZUULI & JAEGER, “Aspects of Dongolawi Roots and Affixes Related to Orthography.”

speaker in my presence for not hiding the problems which had just occurred among that group. I am thankful for all the insider information entrusted to me and to my wife Eliane during our visits.

Proverbs and wise sayings reflect and transmit not only wisdom and long-standing experience, but also cultural stereotypes of self and others. Both a proverb's literal translation⁶ and meaning-based translation⁷ are taken into account. While a proverb's literal translation remains mainly unaltered, its meaning-based translation shifts due to the context in which a proverb is uttered, and, especially in our topic, the speaker's perception of women and their role. With a few proverbs using archaic words, any meaning-based translation is difficult to reconstruct.

Bibliographies related to gender and African proverbs which provide helpful insight for this research are Obododimma OHA (1998) from Ivory Coast, Jeylan HUSSEIN (2005) from Ethiopia, and Tunde AKINWUMI, Olufunke ADEBOYE, and Tosin OTUSANYA (2011) from Nigeria. Geographically closer to the Nile-Nubian valley is Salwa AHMED (2005) from Western Sudan.

Oha codifies fifty Igbo proverbs from Ivory Coast according to whether they are face-threatening, non-face-threatening, or neutral.⁸ The vague term "non-face-threatening" is defined more precisely as "promotion of face for woman."⁹ Within a shame-honor framework, one can speak of "honoring of women." Part of women's negative portrayal in Igbo and some other cultures' proverbs is due to "proverb use [being] a male art."¹⁰ Oha goes as far as considering some proverbs about women as not "cultural models of 'wisdom'."¹¹ The absence of critical analysis of gender-related rhetoric in African proverbs is lamented. As meaning-based translations of the Igbo proverbs are missing, at some places the paper's arguments are not easy to comprehend.

For Hussein "[i]n Africa, gender ideology figures importantly in proverbs,"¹² having "harmful effects,"¹³ especially in terms of control-

6 The literal translation (or allusive plane) renders the proverb nearly "word-for-word" into the meta-language English with slight syntactical reordering of words and morphemes.

7 The meaning-based translation is also called the "interpretative plane" as it reflects the interpretation of the "interpretative community"; see FISH, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, pp. 147–174. While Fish develops his theory of interpretative communities for readers of written texts, it is possible to extend it to speakers of oral texts.

8 OHA, "The Semantics of Female Devaluation in Igbo Proverbs," p. 89.

9 Ibid., p. 90.

10 Ibid., p. 94. Among the Kuku from Southern Sudan proverbs are coined and employed by men only. In particular, the negotiations before a wedding, where only men are present, rely heavily on the proper use of proverbs, some of them speaking derogatorily about women. The publication of Kuku proverbs would result in an opening of men's sphere to women (Scopas Poggo, p.c., 2015).

11 Ibid., p. 94.

12 HUSSEIN, "The Social and Ethno-Cultural Construction of masculinity and femininity in African Proverbs," p. 60.

13 Ibid., p. 61.

ling women. As Oha does, Hussein observes that “[l]ittle attention was given to this aspect of the function of proverbs in Africa.”¹⁴ Not restricting herself to one language, Hussein collects proverbs from a wide range of African languages in order to “intervene in cultural practices,”¹⁵ uncover sexism, the continuation of women’s subordination, and “the intolerability toward a woman’s failure to bear [a] child,”¹⁶ resulting in a classification of gender-related African proverbs into 13 proposed categories. There is an underlying assumption that African proverbs inherently show a negative attitude towards women. Like Oha, Hussein looks at the literal translation, thereby hoping to overcome the ambiguity that “a single proverb can have divergent meanings used under varied circumstances.”¹⁷ Later on I will employ her categories in order to classify gender-related Don-golawi and Kenzi proverbs.

Akinwumi, Adeboye, and Otusanya’s paper reveals a more positive attitude towards gender issues when looking at a female Yoruba merchant born at the end of the 19th century, who became proverbial when a female(!) elder uttered a statement about her. The proverb is placed in its historical context where until the early 20th century (i.e., into the colonial period) Yoruba women “occupied important positions in the local and state economy as well as in the political arena.”¹⁸ The authors warn “against the dangers of interpreting African realities based on western oppositional male/female binary and its attendant privileging of male categories.”¹⁹

Akinwumi, Adeboye, and Otusanya’s paper results in a different outlook on African proverbs than the two former ones. In some African cultures proverbs are coined by women, as in their case. There are African proverbs honoring women and describing them in a non-patriarchal way. Cultural clues need to be interpreted within their own framework and not within a postmodern Western male-power/female-subordination dichotomy or related ideology.

Acknowledging the negative attitude towards women in many Western Sudanese Arab proverbs, Salwa Ahmed’s PhD thesis supports Oha and Hussein. In her collection and analysis of about 850 proverbs she observes that “proverbs are important weapons in

14 Ibid., p. 61.

15 Ibid., p. 62. Hussein avoids the term “status,” which is used a lot when discussing gender but is not really defined. See also FAITHORN, “Gender Bias and Sex Bias,” p. 277.

16 Ibid., p. 73.

17 Ibid., p. 64.

18 The article by AKINWUMI, ADEBOYE, and OTUSANYA, “Rabi “Alaso Oke” of Colonial Lagos.”

19 Ibid. That point is illustrated by WHITEHEAD and CONAWAY, *Self, Sex, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Fieldwork*, p. 11 who write about the Kafe women of Papua New Guinea: “Kafe women do not define their social status primarily in terms of relationships to men, as do many Western women. Hence the concepts of subordination and submissiveness had little or no relevance in analysing female-male relationships among the population [...] studied.” Instead, among the Kafe, kinship considerations outweigh gender and sex considerations. The identity of being a person rather than a woman is primary.

men's hands within a particular society."²⁰ In the context of oppressive gender-related proverbs Salwa Ahmed seems to justify her Islamic faith. If a proverb supports a behavior not fitting a Western mind she frequently adds apologetically that the behavior encouraged is un-Islamic. In conclusion, Salwa portrays Islam as essentially consistent, without critical insight into the different layers Islamic sources provide on gender issues.²¹

In order to be just towards their origin and their belonging to a shame-honor-oriented culture, Dongolawi and Kenzi Nubian proverbs are put into historical context. Subsequently the life of daughter, wife, and mother according to the proverbs is described, revealing their teaching about honoring, dignifying, and promoting women and their abilities. Some analysis follows, classifying the Nile-Nubian proverbs according to Hussein's criteria. Do they encourage "sexual violence," "ridicule women," "instigate men to power and control," or frame "women as passive, acted upon rather than acting"?²² Finally the shift from Nubian languages to Arabic is taken into account. Will a shift in proverbs result in a shift in women's status?

Being a male researcher, opportunities to obtain women's insights were limited. Being influenced by segregated Middle Eastern culture, contact with Nubian female research participants was limited, especially in the two Nubian-language areas around Dongola and Aswan/Kom Ombo. Still, the research is not without female influence. Hāmid Khabīr, the first Dongolawi to gather Dongolawi proverbs, collected proverbs to a great extent from his sister.²³ The Fadija speaker Maher Habbob got his collection of Kenzi proverbs from two female Kenzi students and kindly passed it on to me.²⁴ Es-

20 SALWA AHMED, *Educational and Social Values expressed by Proverbs in two Cultures: Knowledge and Use of Proverbs in Sudan and England*, p. 20, citing NASHWAN, *Women in Popular Proverbs in Jordan and Palestine*, p. 127.

21 As *ibid.*, pp. 88–89: "Islam grants complete rights to women. [...] One should mention here that Islam has highly honoured women. [...] (mis)treatment of women is governed by customs and tradition, not by Islam's view." Bartlotti, *Negotiating Pakhto*, p. 203, observed a similar behavior among his Pashtun research participants when discussing the Pashtun proverb "Islam is under the sword." In that respect Salwa Ahmed is an insider missing the critical reflection of the relationship between religion and proverbs as "competing forms of moral authority." (Bartlotti, *Negotiating Pakhto*, p. 2)

22 HUSSEIN, "The Social and Ethno-Cultural Construction of masculinity and femininity in African Proverbs," pp. 66, 68, 70.

23 HĀMID KHABĪR AL-SHAĪKH, *Nubian Wisdom and Proverbs from Dongola*, and Hāmid Khabīr, p.c. Nearly half of the Dongolawi proverbs discussed in this paper are taken from him. That matches the overall number of Dongolawi proverbs in my proverb collection, in which nearly half of all proverbs stem from him. Recently Hāmid Khabīr has published an updated and extended version of his Nubian proverbs which, however, needs a thorough revision due to careless editing and printing, even in his own eyes. Also, the additional proverbs rarely deal with gender. Therefore, this version has not been considered in this paper.

24 However, only one of their proverbs deals literally with women. I do not assume the students omitted proverbs intentionally. At some stage easterners were more liberal in giving proverbs than western researchers. BURCKHARDT, *Arabic Proverbs*, p. iii, describes the way he edited his Egyptian Arabic proverb collection: "Of those [proverbs] he [Burckhardt

pecially in the Kenzi-speaking area some women provided me with further proverbs.²⁵

Historical overview

Even if historical references are rare, proverbs originate and need to be understood within a people's historical environment. In the following, I restrict historical aspects to outsider sources which talk about the status of ancient and modern Nubian women, beginning in the Kushite period covering the Christian and Muslim periods until more recent history:

The Kushite monarchy was perhaps matrilineal; there were at least five reigning queens. Kushite royal women had very high status, and queens' tombs in the royal cemeteries contained great wealth.²⁶

Under the possible assumption that Aesop was a Nubian²⁷ it is noteworthy that the four books ascribed to Aesop himself do not include a single fable which speaks disparagingly about women or presents western negative stereotypes of women. Instead they reflect women's high status. In the fable "Of the Wicked Thief and the Son" the bad son is likened to the father, not to the mother.²⁸ All fables in the latter sections speaking negatively about women are ascribed to other collectors.

The high status of a Nubian woman connects well with the ancient title of queen mother or "Candace" among Kushite royalty, at least from the time of King Taharqa to the time of the New Testament.²⁹

Later, during the Nubian Christian period

speaking about himself] has omitted a considerable number, many being altogether uninteresting, and others so grossly indelicate that he could not venture to lay them before the public, although it must be acknowledged that they excelled in wit."

25 While among female Andaandi speakers I collected ten proverbs; among female Mattokki speakers there was a greater yield of 66 proverbs. About one third of the Kenzi proverbs in this paper initially were collected from students, one third were given by Kenuzi originating from Heesa Island, having then settled in Dakke during the last century, and the last third from other Kenzi speakers. I would have preferred to include more proverbs uttered in a women-only environment. While my wife had planned to collect further Dongolawi proverbs during a visit to the Sudan in March/April 2015 that fell through.

26 JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, p. 24. While it is acknowledged that after Kushite times in the Nile valley there was a lot of mingling with other people, so that Kushites are not necessarily the same as Nubians, there is a geographical and historical continuum from Kushites to Nubians. Therefore I include the quote.

27 As concluded by LOBBAN, "Was Aesop a Nubian Kummaji (Folkteller)?" However Giovanni Ruffini (p.c., 2018) urges caution. He considers the tradition that Aesop was "Ethiopian" as very late with earlier commentators giving an explicitly Greek origin to him.

28 AESOP, *Aesop's Fables*, p. 59. The fable is more like a parable.

29 Acts 8:27; the Greek original text speaks of "Κανδάκη" (Aland and Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*).

The position of women [during the Christian period] was higher than in the post-Christian period. Women were able to buy, sell, make donations; and they could appear as witnesses, as documents from Qasr Ibrim show. They enjoyed access to education – at least one woman acted as a scribe for one document [...]. In Meinarti there were three Coptic steles of women who were reckoned to be owners of churches.³⁰

In the first half of the 20th century a medical doctor working in Egyptian Nubia praised women highly:

Of all the women in the East, those of Nubia are the most virtuous. [...] Public women, who are met in hundreds in Egypt, are not tolerated in Nubia.³¹

Of course Nubian Egyptian women were in a unique situation:

Before their relocation [i.e. *hijra* to Kom Ombo in 1963/64] a long process of labor migration had brought most Kunuz [men] to Egyptian cities. The segment remaining in Nubia was mostly female by a ratio of 3 to 1. Most of its adult women were widowed, divorced, or married to migrants.³²

This led to many women supporting themselves, either partially or entirely, by agriculture or in commerce. Therefore, a dichotomy of men's and women's domains was not possible.

Also in Sudanese Nubia, women held a prominent position. Andreas Kronenburg, a German anthropologist working in the second half of the 20th century mainly in the Dongolawi speaking area, is referred to as follows:

One of his most important anthropological observations concerned the elevated position of women in Nubian society, in spite of Islamic tradition which, although dominant later, was hitherto unable to dismantle the earlier high position of women proven to exist in the Napatan period.³³

30 WERNER, *Das Christentum in Nubien*, p. 344; translated from German: "Die Stellung der Frau war [in christlicher Zeit] höher als in nachchristlicher Zeit. Frauen konnten kaufen, verkaufen, konnten stiften und konnten als Zeuginnen auftreten, wie die Dokumente von Ibrim zeigen. Sie hatten Zugang zu Bildung, mindestens eine Frau erscheint als Schreiberin eines Dokumentes. [...] In Meinarti fanden sich drei koptische Stelen von Frauen, die als Besitzerinnen von Kirchen bezeichnet wurden."

31 ENDERLIN, "The Nubians Past and Present," pp. 11, 12. There are similar statements to be heard today.

32 CALLENDER, "Gender Relations in Kenuz Public Domains," 193.

33 SCHOLZ, "Konferenzbericht: 6. International Konferenz für nubische Studien," 444; translated from German: "Zu seinen bedeutenden ethnologischen Beobachtungen gehört

Even closer to the turn of the 20th century an American political scientist writes:

Muslim Sudanese women [...] are among the strongest and most independent women that I have ever met.³⁴

The daily chores of a Nubian woman were manifold, not only domestic but also outside of the home. One Kenzi elder born before the *hijra* describes the daily routine: a woman carried water from the river Nile up to her house, fed the pigeons and other animals, prepared and kneaded the flour, prepared breakfast, concerned herself with agriculture, and looked after the fields. Later, she prepared lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner. While bread lasted until the next day other food was cooked fresh each day. *Jakuud* was shared with neighbors. If some bread remained at the end of day, it was dried and prepared as *garguush*.³⁵ In Old Nubia husband and wife worked in partnership as they shared their work in agriculture and made their decisions together.³⁶

Nubian oral stories underline the importance of women, especially as wives and mothers. One Dongolawi fairytale³⁷ begins with the king's daughter telling her father repeatedly: *ten êndotonum* meaning "that is from his wife," implying that without his wife a husband cannot achieve anything of importance. As the father doubts that statement he takes all his daughter's property away and marries her to a lazy pauper. She does not give up, makes her lazy husband work, and successfully improves his character. Finally they build a castle like her father's to which the father is invited. He has to admit that his daughter was right, that "that is from his wife." In their discussions many modern-day Nubians underline women's positive status in history and lament its change. Women were regarded as bearers and transmitters of culture and peacemakers. They sowed the seed of peace in their children. In case of strife and discord between children both mothers acted as intermediators to settle the dispute,³⁸ thereby being role models for children who later

u.a. die hervorgehobene Position der Frau in der nubischen Gesellschaft, trotz der später dort dominierenden islamischen Tradition, die bislang nicht in der Lage war, die frühere, seit der napatäischen Periode belegte hohe Stellung der Frau abzubauen."

34 HALE, "Alienation and Belonging: Visions for Sudan's Post-Islamist Future," p. 30. That includes Nubian women who are Muslim Sudanese. Hale does not research the historic roots of Sudanese women's strength and independence.

35 Muhi 'Abd al-Fatāh, p.c., 2015. *Jakuud* is a Nubian stew, *garguush* a kind of hard biscuit or rusk.

36 Muḥammad Maḥmūd Muḥammad, p.c., 2015. He is Fadidja with one of his father's parents being Kenzi. While Muḥammad Maḥmūd was born after the *hijra* most probably he refers to what he heard from his deceased father, who was regarded as an expert on Nubian culture. Similar the Dongolawi El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, p.c., 2015.

37 MASSENBAUGH, *Nubische Texte im Dialekt der Kunūzi und der Dongolawi*, pp. 152–156

38 As Fathi 'Abd al-Sayid, p.c., 2015, as well as other Nubians.

as grown-ups resolved disputes on a larger scale.³⁹ While the following proverb does not speak explicitly about women, it was uttered by a woman and interpreted in relation to ancient women:

K01⁴⁰ ΕΚΚΙ Δ̄ ΔΟΛΕΛ, ΚΟΥΛΟΥΓΙ Δ̄ ΓΟΛΛΙ.

ekki aa dolel, kulugi aa golli.

“The one who loves you, swallows a stone.”

- ▶ If there is love, there is forgiveness. / If there is love, everything said sounds good.

That led to mothers and older sisters being honoured, respected highly, worshipped or even regarded as “holy”.⁴¹ Younger brothers obeyed their older sisters.⁴²

Of course historical memories are easily flawed by idealization. Still, a positive attitude towards women is reflected in a Nubian proverb available both in Dongolawi and Kenzi:

D01⁴³ ĒN KĀN CΑΒΛΟ ΤΑΝΝΑΝ.

een kaan sablo tannan.

“The wife is [like] the large water trough of the house.”

K02⁴⁴ ĒN KĀNΔ̄ Δ̄ΑΒΙ ΤΕΡΑ.

een kaana jaabi tera.

“The wife is [like] the channel of the house.”

- ▶ The wife rules the house. / The wife brings everything good to the house. [both Dongolawi and Kenzi]

In a society living on the edge of the desert, flowing water literally means life in the home.⁴⁵ So this proverb considers woman as the life-giver and the one who keeps the family “alive.” One example is the fact that some Nubian women still nowadays manage the family finances.⁴⁶

³⁹ Compare the title of a prominent book on Nubia: FERNEA, *Nubians in Egypt*.

⁴⁰ From the female relatives of the late ‘Az al-Dīn Qāsim, Dabood. The proverb number relates to the forthcoming collection of Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs and wise sayings. Dongolawi proverbs are marked by D, Kenzi proverbs by K. All proverbs are written in Old Nubian characters as preferred by Nile Nubians and in Latin characters, making it easier for readers not accustomed to the Old Nubian characters. Usually the literal translation follows, then one or more meaning-based translations, marked by “▶.”

⁴¹ ‘Abdel Wahhab ‘Abd al-Gabir, p.c., 2014. He is from a Fadija background.

⁴² Muḥammad Maḥmūd Muḥammad, p.c., 2015.

⁴³ From HX30. Both research participants, Dongolawi and Kenzi, interpreted *een* as “wife.” Their interpretation parallels Jewish thought as in the Old Testament, Proverbs 31. In Muslim thinking such a saying would honour a mother.

⁴⁴ From Fathi ‘Abd al-Sayid, Dakke

⁴⁵ I want to thank Anne Jennings for discussing that aspect.

⁴⁶ Observed by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥman (p.c., 2016) and myself.

When listening to Nile Nubians talking about the former status of Nubian women, one is reminded of a description of a Swiss Bernese farmer's wife during the first half of the 19th century:

Just as a farmer's son happily becomes a farmer, why should a farmer's daughter not happily become a farmer's wife? It is not because of the husband himself [...] but because of the independent regime that a self-respecting farmer's wife has, and the respect that is hers by right; for [in the canton of Bern] a farmer's wife is the family's intermediary between God and man, the embodiment of the special providence in all things material.⁴⁷

Therefore it may be assumed that the Nile-Nubian view of gender and women shares common aspects with the Yoruba one as discussed in Akinwumi, Adeboye, and Otusanya's paper.

There were two events in Sudanese history which led to a shift in Sudanese women's ancient status and also had consequences for Nubian women. The first was the introduction of slavery in the Funj kingdom, which included the Dongola region:

One consequence of domestic slavery among the middle classes of the Heroic Age [of Sinnar] was a gradual change in the role of women, who found themselves relieved of their traditional contributions to production. Symbolic of their new status was the invention of the symbolic fiction that the female of the species cannot swim – a skill hitherto vital to rural folk in a land where cultivated islands were numerous but boats were few.⁴⁸

The second and even more severe shift took place during the rule of the Mahdiya in the late 19th century:

As a result [...], the women of Kordofan experienced a transformation that subjected them to a decade and half of regulation by the state unlike anything experienced by their mothers or grand-mothers during the Turkiyya or under the rule of the Funj or the Für.⁴⁹

47 GOTTHELF, *Geld und Geist*, p. 47, translated from German: "Wie der Bauernsohn gerne ein Bauer wird, warum sollte die Bauerntochter nicht auch gerne eine Bäuerin werden? Es ist nicht nur wegen dem Manne selbst, [...] sondern wegen dem unabhängigen Regiment, das eine rechte Bäuerin führt, und der Achtung, in der sie steht; denn eine rechte Bäuerin [im Kanton Bern] [...] ist die Mittlerin des Hauses zwischen Gott und Menschen, ist die sichtbare Vorsehung in allen leiblichen Dingen."

48 SPAULDING, *The Heroic Age of Sennar*, p. 193

49 DECKER, "Females and the State in Mahdist Kordofan," p. 100; talking about the Haraza Nubian women of northern Kordofan. Decker does not clarify in what regards the position of women changed except that their situation became more regulated, meaning determined by Islamic sharia law as understood by the Mahdi and his followers. So far I have not come along any source, oral or written, describing the situation in the Nile-Nubian areas; however, similarities can be assumed.

While this quote talks about Kordofan, and the Mahdiya government was short-lived, its founder, the Mahdi, was born on an island close to Dongola, and before the advent of modern railways and roads Kordofan was as distant from Dongola as Khartoum. Everywhere in the Sudan similar developments were experienced. Later, the increase of Arabic Muslim cultural influence in the 20th century impacted Sudanese Nile-Nubian women, too.

In Egypt among the Kenzi Nubians other historical events showed similar results, especially the *hijra* when Nubians had to leave their home land and were resettled in the Kom Ombo area surrounded by non-Nubian Egyptians.

The Life of a Nubian Woman – According to the Proverbs

This paper centers on the life of Nubian women as described by their proverbs. Further insights into the life of a Kenzi Nubian woman before the relocation to Kom Ombo in 1964, especially the wedding, the raising of children and her work, are provided by SCHÄFER (1935) based on material collected by the Kenzi Samuël Alī Hisēn.

Gender-related proverbs and sayings center on family life. The family is a vital pillar especially in times of transition and crisis. In the following, I describe the life of a Nubian daughter and woman based on Dongolawi proverbs, adding and comparing features from Kenzi proverbs. A woman grows up as a daughter within her extended family and becomes suitable for marriage. Her wedding ceremony is the highlight of her life, and hopefully she brings up her own children, continuing the life cycle.

Daughters and Sons

In Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs, parents are viewed as their children's owners, whether they are daughters or sons:

Do2⁵⁰ TIPTI KIƆƆI

tirti kinynyi

“Without owner”

- He is without family / an illegitimate child.

50 From HX13; co-investigated with Muḥammad Ḥasan. Seventeen Dongolawi proverbs were taken from HĀMID KHABĪR AL-SHAIKH, *Nubian Wisdom and Proverbs from Dongola*, 2007. I mark these proverbs by HX. The number (here: 13) following HX denotes the number in the proverb collection.

As in 2007 Andaandi orthography rules had not been established, I revised Hāmid Khabīr's spelling applying the rules nowadays in use among Dongolawi who read and write their language. Hāmid Khabīr is aware of my spelling changes and agrees with using an updated orthography when presenting his proverbs. He himself is also in the process of updating the spelling of the proverbs he collected.

- Ko3⁵¹ ἀφφι τῖρτῖγοδον κάλου, τάλλεμνοῦ.
affi tirtiigodon kalu, tallemnu.
 “The child eats with the owner [the parents], it does not walk [with them].”
- Especially for parents eating with little children is possible, they just eat less and leave more for the others. However, walking with children is difficult as they are slower or want to be carried.

While more could be added about children, I focus on Nubian proverbs which treat daughters and sons separately, taking into account that Dongolawi and Kenzi *tood* has two meanings, “son” and “child.” So far three Dongolawi and two Kenzi proverbs mention daughters unambiguously. Only one Dongolawi and one Kenzi proverb mention a son explicitly. One Kenzi proverb talking about a daughter was collected from a female speaker and gives a young woman a powerful weapon to justify herself:

- Ko4⁵² ἀῶαμ ἀῖ ἀμβᾶβν βοῦροῦ, ἰκκε τερε, ᾶ ὠἔρα.
asham ay ambaabn buru, ikke tere, aa weera.
 “Well mannered, I am my father’s daughter, like this, they [the people] say.”
- Your slandering about me is not right.

One Dongolawi and one Kenzi proverb talking about daughters are similar in wording, yet not necessarily in meaning:

- Do3⁵³ βοῦροῦ τῖμβᾶβν δᾶρ ἰῶκαρτῖν.
buru timbaabn daar ishkartin.
 “A daughter is [like] a guest in her father’s home.”
- It is more important to have sons than daughters, since after marriage a son stays at home whereas a daughter leaves.
 - A woman becomes the ruler in her own home, not her father’s.

The proverb may be considered more recent as in former times daughters did not necessarily leave the home.⁵⁴ Instead daughters learnt to be willing to help and to stay with their parents when they grew old. They were regarded as a blessing.⁵⁵ In contrast, in the

51 From Fathi ‘Abd al-Sayid, Dakke. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr Ḥasim (p.c., 2015) remembers that in former times Nubian parents and their children ate together, offering the children the opportunity to get acquainted with Nubian customs.

52 From the wife of ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Abd al-Raūf, Dakke.

53 From El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, Khannaag.

54 Ibrāhīm Muḥammad, p.c., 2015

55 Aḥmad ‘Uthmān, p.c., 2016. While talking in German, he used the Arabic word *baraka* instead of the German term “Segen.” The connotation of *baraka* is wider and more positive than the English “blessing” or the German “Segen.”

mind of many modern-day Nubians a son is more beneficial than a daughter, as after marriage a daughter tends to move in with her husband's family while at least in the rural areas a son remains with his parents.⁵⁶ When a daughter gives birth to a grandson, it is not named after her father as it would be in the case of a son.⁵⁷

Kenzi Nubians have a similar proverb, yet interpret it differently:

Ko5⁵⁸ BOYPOY IYKAPTIMA.

buru ishkartima.

A daughter is [like] a guest.

- ▶ Everything is done for a daughter.
- ▶ I am still caring for my unmarried daughter.
- ▶ I am caring for my married daughter who comes for a visit.⁵⁹

The “interpretive communities” of the Dongolawi and the Kenzi research participants differ. While usually an *ishkarti* “guest” is highly respected, the proverb does not imply this connotation here.⁶⁰ However, both Kenzi research participants who originate from different villages value their daughters at least as much as their sons, which may be reflected in their interpretations. Additionally, the Kenzi custom where the groom moves into the bride's family's home until he is able to build a house himself enhances the daughter's status.⁶¹

Nubians are glad when their daughters are considered beautiful. Especially large eyes are considered attractive.⁶² One Dongolawi proverb compares the “beauty” of a girl with a kind of bird:

Do4⁶³ BOYPOY KAPMALEN MICCINIGI KŌΛ

buru karmalen missincigi kool.

⁵⁶ As 'Abd al-Qādir Samiltod, p.c., 2016.

⁵⁷ Older Dongolawi woman, p.c., 2014. Her interpretation reveals contemporary thought as in former times some Nubian children carried the names of their mothers.

⁵⁸ From Fathi 'Abd al-Sayid, Dakke.

⁵⁹ 'Ali Aḥmad, p.c., 2015. He distinguishes the proverb's meaning by whether it speaks about an unmarried or a married woman.

⁶⁰ 'Ammār Ya'qūb, p.c., 2016 and 'Abd al-Qādir Samiltod, p.c., 2016.

⁶¹ A different approach would be to consider the husband as guest: one foreigner being in frequent contact with Kenzi women was surprised how easily they dealt with the absence of their husbands working in Egyptian cities or in the Gulf States. For the women a husband's presence meant more work. However, Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs do not emphasize the husband as an occasional visitor.

⁶² Girls even in a strict Islamic society love to put some blue make-up around their eyes and use it to their advantage: in 2000, shortly before Friday prayer, I was the only customer in a pickup truck between Seleem 2 and Seleem ferry station. The young driver was willing to drive me back, setting the prize at 1000 SD, ten times the usual fare. Two young girls appeared with lovely eyes. Having the same destination, they sweet-talked the driver into taking each of us to the ferry for the usual 100 SD. After 10 minutes of the girls alternately putting on pretty faces and pouting, the driver gave in. The older sister sat in front with the driver and the younger one behind. The proverb always reminds me of that story.

⁶³ From HX79. The proverb does not regard a girl as a sexual object (El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, p.c., 2015).

“A girl having the eyes of the Oriental turtle dove.” (The *kar-mal* is a bird with big eyes which is considered beautiful. In size it is similar to a pigeon and has colourful feathers.⁶⁴ It is relatively unknown among contemporary Nubians.)

- She is a beautiful girl.

One proverb talking about a girl’s beauty, without mentioning *buru* explicitly, is:

Do5⁶⁵ TENN MACKANE KOLEN6IGI KOYCIN.

tenn maskane kolencigi kusin.

“Her beauty stops the waterwheels.”

- She is very beautiful.

In Nubian poetry “beauty” is connected with being close to the river.⁶⁶ The area next to the river is the most beautiful area of the whole village as it is the place most likely to be green.

The proverb imagines a meeting of a waterwheel attendant (male) and a young woman (female) during work hours. Due to her beauty⁶⁷ she distracts the waterwheel attendant, makes the expensive waterwheel not work properly and thereby stops income. By associating “beauty” and “waterwheel” “beauty” is not necessarily regarded as something basically negative; however, a stopped waterwheel is a warning that not everybody who looks nice on the outside brings a positive outcome. Instead, contemporary Nubians would confirm the Sudanese Arabic proverb: “Beauty is beauty of manners.”⁶⁸

When daughters grow older, they begin wearing beautiful garments, or at least wish to do so:

Do6⁶⁹ KADEN ĒN6I

kaden eenci

Women’s garment.

- This woman wears nice clothing but is not good at anything else.

64 ‘Alā al-Dīn Khayri, p.c., 2017

65 From HX16. Again, the proverb does not regard a girl as a sexual object (El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, p.c., 2015).

66 As in the two Dongolawi poems transcribed in Ibrāhīm and Bell, 1990.

67 Already Burckhardt during his travels mainly in Kenzi Nubia observed beautiful ladies: “The women are all well made, and though not handsome, have generally sweet countenances, and very pleasing manners; I have even seen beauties among them” (BURCKHARDT, *Travels in Nubia*, p. 145).

68 SALWA AHMED, *Educational and Social Values expressed by Proverbs in two Cultures*, Sudanese proverb 299.

69 From HX31.

The proverb is not only valid for daughters, it is used for wives and other women as well. The other Dongolawi proverb talking about a daughter, D15, will be dealt with later as it symbolizes the prospective bride.

In comparison, proverbs dealing explicitly with a son are:

Do7⁷⁰ ΜΕΞΕΜΕΛ ΑΝΝΤΟΔΝ ΕΩΡΕ ΔΑΡΙΝ ΤΑΝΘΕΓΙ ΑΔΔΟ ΜΕΡΚΟΝ.

Mehemed anntoodn ewre jaarin tancegi addo merkon.

“My son Mehemed’s agriculture cut [stopped] the neighbors’ alms to me.”

- ▶ When a man has work, or at least his relatives, others outside the family expect him to be self-sufficient and don’t give him anything, even when he has nothing to eat.

Ko6⁷¹ ΟΓΙΔ, ΟΝΔΙΓΙ ΟΥΚΕΔ ΔΓΙΛ, Δ ΔΙΜΝΟΥ.

ogij, ondigi usked aagil, aa diimnu.

“The man who has given birth to a male, he does not die.”

- ▶ He who leaves behind a male successor will not be forgotten.

Nubians regard themselves not as individuals but as part of an enduring continuum. Especially sons are expected to support their parents and carry on their names. If a Nubian father only has daughters he “cries” as nobody continues carrying his name.⁷²

In conclusion, among Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs the gender difference between children and between the male and female lineage is not the most important aspect. Instead they encourage behaviour tending towards customary African culture, which is inclined to regard male and female kin without difference, as in the Bemba proverb:

abana ba mfubu: bangala amatenga yonse.

“Children of the hippo play in all the pools of water, in the river or lake.”

- ▶ Children belong to both their paternal and maternal kin.⁷³

One Kenzi man explained the difference between Nile-Nubian and Arab customs as “Arabs living in the desert needed to fight in order to survive. Men were more beneficial as they protected their tribal communities in times of war. In contrast, Nubians were settled and engaged in agriculture where both boys and girls were of use.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ From HX74.

⁷¹ From Kenzi students (5). This is the only Kenzi proverb collected thus far which regards male offspring more positively than female offspring.

⁷² The late Umm Hamdi, p.c., 2003.

⁷³ KAPOLYO, *The Human Condition*, p. 131. Bemba is spoken in Zambia.

⁷⁴ Khālid Karār, p.c., 2012

Orphans or children whose parents have died, a proverbial topic of other African languages,⁷⁵ are missing. That may be due to Islam, which treats orphans in a different way from the Christian faith.⁷⁶ Instead, Nubians expect relatives to take in children whose parents have died in a kind of guardian or trustee relationship.

Finding a Marriage Partner

Nubian marriage is one of the rights of passage regulated by specific customs. While some customs change, their controlling mechanism remains:

In the days before girls went to school in great numbers, they married between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The preferred marriage partner was a relative from either side of the family; often siblings betrothed their children to each other. Although the senior female members of the family were usually the initiators and primary negotiators, it was important that both male and female seniors agreed to the match before it could take place.⁷⁷

Changes introduced during the past decades include an increasing marriage age to enable both partners to finish their formal education⁷⁸, the search for a marriage partner outside of the family, the decrease in the number of feast days,⁷⁹ the introduction of electronic music instruments or pre-recorded music and, in the Sudan, the re-introduction of mass marriages.⁸⁰

Change is limited when identity is endangered:

75 GOLKA, *Die Flecken des Leoparden*, p. 136, lists proverbs from Malagasy (Madagascar) and Kundu (a dialect of Oroko in Cameroon) talking about orphans.

76 Adoption in Islam is well explained in <http://islam.about.com/cs/parenting/a/adoption.htm> (last visited on 3 November 2015). One aspect is: "When the child is grown, members of the adoptive family are not considered blood relatives [...] members of the adoptive family would be permissible as possible marriage partners, and rules of modesty exist between the grown child and adoptive family members of the opposite sex."

77 JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, p. 56

78 Especially among the Kenuzi. Still, some marriages happen when the bride is about 17 years of age. (p.c.)

79 Especially in the cities.

80 Based on the *kora* marriage ceremony practiced in the former Funj kingdom. SPAULDING, *The Heroic Age of Sennar*, p. 107, describes *kora* as: "It differed from ordinary marriage in two ways. The amount and forms of wealth that changed hands at marriage were publicly fixed at a uniform standard lower than prevailing rates, and communitywide compliance was assured by the practice of public mass marriages of all eligible community members." In 2005 in Shaikh Shariif I observed a well-organized mass "agid ceremony for 26 couples. Guests came from different villages, especially some sheikhs, lots of men and a few older women. Pre-recorded music was played from tape. While a few dignitaries gave their speeches, the guests were more interested in the soda, some sweets and dates. The first signing of contracts was properly performed. A bride's older relative and a groom's older relative gave their signatures. Afterwards the guests were told that the remaining signings would be performed in the same way. So the men started to leave and the event carried on without nearly any audience. While there is no historical indication that mass marriages were performed in the medieval Nubian kingdoms there is also no clue as to where that tradition came from.

In conclusion, concerning the [Nubian] wedding ceremony as part of the strategies for maintaining identity, it is worth saying that while adopting the usual traditions of Alexandria, the Nubians [in Alexandria] have kept various features which were the custom in Old Nubia.⁸¹

The mother teaches her daughters cooking and cleanliness in order to increase her chances of being married.⁸² Among the Kenuzi, additional educational goals include the expectation that sons be hard-working in order to find a job, buy a home and then marry.⁸³

Parents prefer their children to marry before their death in order to ensure that the marriage partner is chosen with their consent, which frequently means that the partner is a related Nubian.⁸⁴ While formerly, “women obviously directed the process of spouse selection,”⁸⁵ nowadays the option of bride and groom choosing each other is more regularly employed while the parents are asked for approval. This is obvious from the increasing number of Nubians marrying outside their related kin, including non-Nubians.

It is not expected that a girl actively searches for a marriage partner in spite of Muḥammad’s first wife Khadija proposing to him.⁸⁶

In order to overcome the difficult first step, Nubian society encourages marriage while not hiding its consequences. To the man it is said:

Do8⁸⁷ ἸΡΙ ὠῶΡΟ ὠἔΚΙ ΚΟΥΣΟΥΡΟ!

iri shooro weeki kujuro!

“Please, put on one light rope!” (*Iri*: From the marriage onwards a husband has to direct and protect his wife. Therefore, he is not as free as he was before marriage. *Irigi kujur* also means “to write a marriage contract.” *Iri digir*, lit. “a rope falls,” denoting the marriage.)

- Encouragement (usually by a man) to a man to marry a woman.

Besides marrying for the first time, men are especially encouraged to remarry after their wife dies in order to have a helpmate. Possible

81 ROTH, *Nubier in Alexandria*, p. 53. In the original: “Zusammenfassend lässt sich über die Hochzeit als Teil der Strategien zur Identitätswahrung festhalten, dass die Nubier sich trotz der Anpassung an die in Alexandria üblichen Ausrichtungen verschiedene Elemente bewahrt haben, die im Alten Nubien üblich waren.”

82 People from Urbi, p.c., 2005.

83 As Ismā’il al-‘Abādī’s wife, p.c., 2006.

84 Thābit Zāki, p.c., 2014.

85 CALLENDER, “Gender Relations in Kenuz Public Domains,” p. 195.

86 As in the *sīra* of Ibn Ishāq as transmitted by Ibn Hishām in the 9th century which Muslims consider an authoritative biography.

87 From HX110.

options include a formerly divorced wife, because of the mutual children.⁸⁸

While, especially in the cities outside the language area, it is possible to meet an unmarried Nubian woman, it contradicts the Nubian perception of a woman's biography. The man marrying a woman is performing a good deed. Therefore the proverb can be said to encourage a man to marry a woman just for her own sake.

The proverb likens a woman to a "light rope." As long as a man is married it is said that "he is on the rope."⁸⁹

In order to encourage a girl to marry, regardless of the characteristics or financial means her marriage partner might have, it is said:

- Dog⁹⁰ ΟΓΙΔΝ ΟΛΛΙ ΩΑΛΑ ΚΑΤΡΕΝ ΟΛΛΙ.
ogijn olli wala katren olli.
 "A man's shade rather than a wall's shade."
 ► Encouragement to a woman to marry a man.

If a man is engaged he says:

- D10⁹¹ ΔĪ ΔΓΙΛΓΙ ΚΟΥCΕΔ ΔΓΡΙ.
ay agilgi kused aagri.
 "I have opened the mouth."
 ► I am engaged.

In accordance with ancient regional customs the oldest daughter is to be married first:

- D11⁹² ΚΑΡΔΕΛΓΙ ΟΩΩΕΛΕΝ ΔΟΡΡΑΝ.
karjelgi owwelen joorran.
 "They harvest the ripe first."
 ► The oldest daughter has to be married first.

As noted before it is not strange for a groom to take a very young bride:

- D12⁹³ ĒN ΟΓΙΔΝ ΟΓΙΡ ΔΟΥΛ ΔΝΙΝ.

88 As observed in Toshka in the resettlement area.

89 El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, p.c., 2015.

90 From ΤΑΗΑ, "Proverbs in a threatened Language Variety in Africa." In his article on Dongolawi proverbs two pages deal with "Marriage and Family Issues."

91 From Muḥammad Ḥasan, Tura. The meaning seems to have changed since then. In the 1920s it still meant a ceremony during the night when the bride and the groom were on their own for the first time. "The bridegroom then gives her a present 'to open her mouth,' but though she accepts the present she is not supposed to speak at least until the following night" (CROWFOOT, "Wedding Customs in the Northern Sudan," p. 8).

92 From Aḥmad Sāti, Buunaarti.

93 From ΤΑΗΑ, "Proverbs in a threatened Language Variety in Africa."

een ogijn ogir duul anin.

“The [young] woman grows up on her husband’s chest.”

- ▶ Young girls could still be big enough to marry.

K07⁹⁴ ΦΕΛΑΝΔΙ, ΔΑΓΙΝ Τᾶλ, ΒΙ ΒΟΡΚΙΔΔΙΜΝΟΥ.

felanji, jagin taal, bi boorkiddimnu.

“The one who comes pushing [is proactive] will not be caused to collapse.”

- ▶ When you marry a girl young she will not become an old spinster.

If one waits too long and is too careful about choosing, suitable partners may have already gone:

D13⁹⁵ Τᾶ, ΒΑΡΡΕΓΙ ΒΑΡΒΟΥΛΛΟ ΔΙΓΙΡΙΝ!

taa, barregi barbuullo digirin!

“Come, fall in the intervening space you chose!”

- ▶ You want to select the good, yet because you wait so long you find the bad.
- ▶ You are taking a long time to find a wife. In the end you have to take what remains.

However, among the Dongolawi the proverbs of encouragement are balanced by four proverbial warnings of choosing a prospective bride (or groom) carefully by observing the bride, her mother, and her roots:

D14⁹⁶ ΩΕΛ ΣΟΥΜᾶΡΚΙΛ, ΔΟΥΓΓΟΥΡΚΙ ΟΥΣΚΙΝ.

wel sumaarkil, dungurki uskin.

“The dog which is in a hurry gives birth to a blind [one].”

- ▶ Don’t rush; instead be patient!

D15⁹⁷ ΕΔΚΙΝ, ΒΟΥΡΟΥΝ ΤΙΝΕΝΓΙ ΕΔ!

edkin, burun tineengi ed!

“If you marry, [you] marry the daughter’s mother!”

- ▶ Look at the characteristics of the bride’s mother. Her daughter will be similar.

D16⁹⁸ ΔΕΚΚΙ ΤΑΒΒΕΛΓΟΝ ΔΕΝCΙΡ ἈΝΙΝ,

ΚΑΤΡΕΓΙ ΤΑΒΒΕΛΓΟΝ ΚΑΤΡΕ ἈΝΙΝ.

94 From Kenzi students (27).

95 From ‘Abd al-Raūf, Old Dongola.

96 From HX26.

97 From HX91.

98 From El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, Khannaag. Frequently the proverb is said from woman to woman.

deski tabbelgon densir anin, katregi tabbelgon katre anin.

“While the one who touched the fat [something valuable], becomes full of goodness; the one who touched the wall, he becomes a wall.”

- If you marry a good wife / husband you will become good, if you marry a bad wife / husband you will become bad.

While Nubians and “Sudanese believe that children inherit their mother’s and father’s behaviour”⁹⁹ there has been no proverb attested where the bride’s character traits are connected with a male relative. With Nubian proverbs the mother’s behavior determines that of the child. In reality Nubians acknowledge that both mother and father imprint the child’s behavior.

Among the Kenuzi there is only one proverbial warning. The mother of D15 is replaced by the paternal aunt:

Ko8¹⁰⁰ BOYPOYΓI TIMBĀNECCINĀ ĪNĀ CŌPO Ā BĀḌBŌY.

burugi timbaanessina iina sooro aa baajbuu.

“The writing of the hand of the girl’s paternal aunt is written in her.”

- The girl becomes like her paternal aunt.

For both sides, bride and groom, family roots are to be considered:

D17¹⁰¹ OYPCETI KŌΛNAP ΔŌYPACTI, TE ΦḌWIPŌY ΔŌYN?

ursegi koolnar juurangi, te faawiru juun?

“While going with someone having a root [is possible], why are you going [with someone] without a root?”

- When marrying take into consideration the origin of the family. A family “with root” is to be preferred.

Once when a daughter came along with a non-Nubian suitor, her parents asked her: *gurbattiga bi aare?*¹⁰² As Nubians, like other human beings, tend to consider their own family positively, a close relative of the other sex becomes the best choice of partner for a stable marriage. It is a means of protecting oneself and the related family from being talked about and being shamed. Marrying a non-

99 SALWA AHMED, *Educational and Social Values expressed by Proverbs in Two Cultures*, p 40; confirmed by El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, p.c., 2015.

100 From Fathi ‘Abd al-Sayid, Dakke. There is no explanation why the proverb talks about the girl’s paternal aunt. In former times maternal relatives were regarded as closer than paternal relatives. The maternal uncle functioned in many regards as one’s own father (Thābit Zāki, p.c., 2016).

101 From HX122.

102 ‘Ali Ahmad, p.c., 2012. The Kenzi phrase means “You take an outsider/ foreigner?” For more insight into the preference of insiders as marriage partners see JAEGER, “The Perception of the Outside and the Outsider in Dongolawi and Kenzi Proverbs.”

relative may lead to exclusion from one's family.¹⁰³ The marriage partner should at least be from the same village or close by,¹⁰⁴ minimizing negative surprises regarding the marriage partner's future behaviour. Concerning the wife, gossiping about one's own family is considered negative conduct, being content with what is available and sharing her thoughts with her husband positive. Egyptian non-Nubian women are supposedly different, especially more secretive towards her husband.¹⁰⁵

The following proverbs, implicitly or explicitly directed towards the male suitor, support choosing a relative as marriage partner. The first five proverbs all have the same meaning, as do the final two:

D18¹⁰⁶ ΖΑΜΒΟΥ ΩΑΡΡΙΓΙ ΟΛΛΙΚΙΡΙΝ.

hambu warrigi ollikirin.

"The doum palm causes shade in the distance."

D19¹⁰⁷ ΖΑΜΒΟΥ ΤΕΝΝ ΤΟΓΟΓΙ ΟΛΛΙΚΙΡΙΜΟΥΝ.

hambu tenn togoogi ollikirmun.

"The doum palm does not give shade to its lower (part)."

K09¹⁰⁸ ΑΜΒΟΥ ΝΑΩΙΤΤΕ ΩΑΡΡΙΡ ΝΟΥΝΙΓΙ ΔΓ ΔΩΙ.

ambu nawitte warrir nuunigi aag aawi.

"Like the doum palm he makes shade in the distance."

D20¹⁰⁹ ΤΕΝΝ ΔΔΔΙ ΚΟΥΣΒΟΥΝ, Ε66ΕΛΙΝΔΙΓΙ ΤΑΓΙΡΙΝ.

tenn daadi kusbuun, eccelindigi tagirin.

"His vessel remains open, he covers what belongs to others."

K10¹¹⁰ ΕΝΝΑ ΚΙΣΙΒ ΩΑΡΚΙΔΔΙΒΟΥΝ ΓΟΝ, ΖΟΛΙΝΔΙΓΙ Δ ΤΑΓΙΡΙ.

enna kisib warkiddibuun goon, zoolindigi aa tagiri.

"Although your earthen bowl is exposed, you cover what belongs to others."

► He wants to marry outside of his relatives.

¹⁰³ Haydar Azzain, p.c., 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Kamāl Hisayn, p.c., 2005. There is a field between the villages of Teeti and Urbi so they are considered to be distant. Between Sori and Urbi there is no field so they are close.

¹⁰⁵ Kenzi Nubian from Alexandria, p.c., 2009 and 2010. Being content goes against the observation that Nubian women enjoy nice clothing more than non-Nubian Egyptian women. HOPKINS and SOHAR ΜΕΗΑΝΝΑ, *Nubian Encounters*, p. 37, note that the concept a suitor has of his future wife and the woman he marries if he is able to choose are diametrically opposed in some instances. I would take anything said by Nubian men about female-male relations with a pinch of salt. ROTH, *Nubier in Alexandria*, p. 22, confirms that Nubian women in Egypt usually do not work outside of the home. Twenty-five years later that is still valid for most married Nubian women.

¹⁰⁶ From HX127.

¹⁰⁷ From El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, Khannaag.

¹⁰⁸ From Ramaḍān Muḥammad, Allaagi.

¹⁰⁹ From El-Shafie El-Guzuuli, Khannaag.

¹¹⁰ From Ramaḍān Muḥammad, Allaagi.

- D21¹¹¹ INN IṢḤARI WĀNḌIN, IRINḌIGI TAḠIPPOY.
inn ishari waandin, irindigi tagirru.
 “Your (pl.) leavened flour appears, you (pl.) cover [the leavened flour] belonging to other people.”
- D22¹¹² OḠIS TENN KOYBEGI TAḠIPIN.
ogij tenn kubegi tagirin.
 “The man covers his jar.”¹¹³
- You (pl.) / He should marry one of your / his relatives.

If a suitor has restricted means he has to be satisfied with less:

- D23¹¹⁴ KOYKKAĪ BŌḌAN MŌNMŌYNOYN.
kukkay boolan moonmunun.
 “A man without genitals / a eunuch does not hate a woman without uterus.”
- Somebody who has something negative inside is not interested in the negative aspects of somebody else.

After finding a suitable marriage partner, the next step would be discussion of dowry or bride wealth payment. However, proverbs dealing with it are absent so far.

The Wedding

In the life of most Nubians, wedding celebrations were and are the most joyful of events. In former times the bride would prepare herself for a whole month, in order that on the wedding night fine fragrances might emanate from body and clothing. One old Dongolawi woman wore a ring in her nose for that occasion, and proudly showed the piercing.¹¹⁵

Among the traditional Kenuzi, bride and groom must invite all the guests personally. In one instance the bride was assumed to require four days for inviting everyone in her home village and one further day in the next city. Even ill feeling is not a reason to exclude a villager from being invited, a helpful custom to heal hurts and quarrels. Whoever does not turn up for the wedding and sends no apology is ostracized.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ From HX114.

¹¹² From ТАНА, “Proverbs in a threatened Language Variety in Africa.”

¹¹³ There is a similar Sudanese Arabic proverb, but no Modern Standard Arabic proverb. From a Sudanese Arabic point of view SALWA AHMED, *Educational and Social Values expressed by Proverbs in Two Cultures*, p. 201, explains: “The word pot metaphorically refers to the blood relationship.”

¹¹⁴ From HX82.

¹¹⁵ Amna (old Dongolawi woman), p.c. to Eliane Jaeger, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Hasan ‘Abbās, p.c., 2008. The danger of not inviting anybody is vividly described in the fairy tale “Kōgna gissa - The story of the raven” as collected and published by MASSENBACH,

The first highlights of any wedding celebration attended by a crowd of villagers and other guests are the nights of *ḥinna* where at the end of the celebrations both bride and groom are dyed with a brown-reddish paste from the *ḥinna* plant on hands and feet. The mother of the bride provides the *ḥinna*. Bride and groom celebrate separately. Among the Kenuzi the nights of *ḥinna* have been reduced to one, the friends of the bride and groom celebrating together, spaced somewhat apart. The *ḥinna* process occurs in the middle of celebrations.

The final ceremony is the wedding night. In the rural areas it includes a communal meal, frequently before the bride and groom have arrived. Formerly it lasted until sunrise, as during the second half of the night the moon shone brightest.¹¹⁷ Nowadays it can be organized by a catering service or, in the cities, even be omitted. With both, the nights of *ḥinna* and the wedding, a music group is invited.¹¹⁸ In Dongola at communal wedding celebrations only the boys dance; the girls stand by, and watch. Among the Kenuzi boys and girls dance.

One proverb uses the wedding meal as a metaphor:

D24¹¹⁹ ΕΡΟΝ ΖΔΛΛΑΡ ΤΟΝ ΚΑΛΚΙΝ, ΕΝΝ ΒΑΛΕΡ ΤΟΥΡΟΥΓ ΔΟΥΚΚΙΝ.
eron haalar toon kalkin, enn baler turug dukkin.
 “If you eat from the cooking vessel, at your wedding the wind will start.”

While at a wedding the groom shows as much generosity as possible, the proverb shames him jokingly as being a poor man. Only poor people eat from a cooking vessel instead from a bowl.

Meanwhile the night of *ḥinna* has gained in prominence, frequently even more important than the wedding night.

With the advent of photo studios a date in the next town has become a fixture. Both the bride and the groom are shown at their best thanks to modern graphics editing software, as Adobe Photoshop is a more recent development.

Since about the turn of the century wedding celebrations are taped on video or DVD and afterwards shown to visitors or lent to neighbors or relatives living elsewhere.¹²⁰ The focus is on bride,

Nubische Texte im Dialekt der Kunūzi und der Dongolawi, pp. 22–23.

117 Farīd Muḥammad, p.c., 2017 and Ajīb Jabāli, p.c., 2017.

118 As long as it is not a Salafi wedding where strict Islamic rules are adhered to. With the increase of Nile-Nubians working in Saudi Arabia where strict Islamic rules are enforced these ideas became popular among returning Nubians who either want to be especially pious or receive financial aid from a Salafi sponsor. Due to financial constraints pre-recorded music may be played.

119 From Aḥmad Hamza, Lebeb.

120 Muḥammad Tutu, p.c., 2010. In Dabood village every household is allowed to have the wedding video for one day.

groom, groom's mother, and the golden jewelry given by the groom to his bride, even pasted into passages of the video in which other guests are shown while the bride is not.¹²¹

Among the Dongolawi if the bride is below the age of consent, bride and groom live for some period in her family's household.¹²² Among the Kenuzi sometimes the new house is erected inside the living compound of the groom's future mother-in-law. For the first year the newly-weds live with the wife's family,¹²³ clearly strengthening the wife's position. In the cities, with limited space the custom has been difficult to maintain and nowadays it is less observed in Nubian villages as well,¹²⁴ another aspect of adapting Nubian culture to a changing environment.

Being married

After her wedding night the bride wakes up to her duties as a wife, not always what she expected. Nile-Nubian proverbs show a wide range of attitudes, from praise to mistrust. The wife is always expected to be efficient in domestic affairs,¹²⁵ and generally speaking she is considered the better manager of the household's finances.¹²⁶ Preferably, she earns some money while working at home. Still, the husband needs money to support his mother and sister. One Dongolawi man married for the expressed reason that he wanted his mother to have someone to do her housework.¹²⁷

Despite their heavy work load Nubian women before the *hijra* gave a generally happy and satisfied impression to the outsider. While there were no insurances against life's calamities, their safety was provided by their extended family.

In other proverbs women are shown as needing protection. Besides D21, one further proverb likens women to "leavened flour" who must be well looked after to prevent shame. This train of thought underlines the previous observation that men are performing a good deed when marrying: they divert a woman from improper, shameful behavior.

121 As observed in wedding videos shown to me.

122 Anas Muḥi al-Din, p.c., 2010. Formerly that was a general custom among the Dongolawi; see Crowfoot, "Wedding Customs in the Northern Sudan," p. 9.

123 Hasan 'Abbās, p.c., 2008. That observation restricts Callender and el Guindi's statement, "The Kenuzi," pp. 111–112: "The [Kenzi] social organization is still based in concept, and largely in practice, on a Bedouin-like tribal structure that shows very few traces of the matrilineal system characterizing Nubia before the Arab invasion." While the tribal organization of the Kenuzi clearly shows Arabic influence, its features of supporting women in transitional phases are different.

124 Faṭḥi 'Abd al-Sayid, p.c., 2015. Among the Kenzi, the resettlement homes built during the *hijra* offer much less space for establishing a new family than the spacious court yards of Old Nubia.

125 See proverbs Do1 and Ko2 above.

126 As Muḥammad 'Abdallah, p.c., 2017; and other sources.

127 Dongolawi man in Khartoum, p.c., 2009.

- D25¹²⁸ ΙΩΔΡΕ ΚΟΥCΒΟΥΛΓΙ, ΩΕΛΛΙ ΜΑΛΛΕ ΓΑΨΙΡΑΝ.
ishare kusbuulgi, welli malle gaanyiran.
 “When the ishare is open, all dogs lick [from it].” (*ishare*: clay vessel used for fermenting milk to yogurt)
- ▶ Do not walk on your own as a woman.
 - ▶ She is an immoral woman who walks on her own at night.
 - ▶ She has a bad reputation and will end up promiscuous.

While adultery among Nubians is not referred to in public, it is still described by some proverbs:

- K11¹²⁹ ΚΙCΙΒ ΩΑΡΒΟΥΛΛΟ, ΩΕΛ Α ΕΚΚΙ.
kisib warbuullo, wel aa ekki.
 “In the uncovered earthen bowl, the dog urinates.”
- ▶ She is an immoral woman who goes with other men.
- K12¹³⁰ ΟΥΡΤΙ ΩΑΡΡΙ ÌΑ ΑΕΓΓΙ, ΔΕΛΕΓ Α ΚΑΛΙ.
urti warri ya angi, jeleg aa kali.
 “The domestic animal being far away, the jackal eats [it]. / The domestic animal that moves away from the home, the jackal eats [it].”
- ▶ Exhortation to keep one’s wife close.

These proverbs compare an adulterous man to a dog, or a jackal which is close to a dog, with no favourable connotation. In the last proverb the wife is like a domestic animal in need of protection.¹³¹

One approach for ensuring protection of married and unmarried female relatives is offered by a first-born Dongolawi son. He prefers staying in the Sudan to working outside of the country, being ready to earn less. He regards it as his duty as the eldest son to ensure that his brothers-in-law behave well towards his sisters.¹³²

¹²⁸ From HX129.

¹²⁹ From Kenzi students (21).

¹³⁰ From Kenzi students (76).

¹³¹ A nearly mono-lingual Kenzi grandmother told her grandson a metaphor where the roles are changed (Khālid Karār, p.c., 2012, in English): If a dog approaches a human there are two ways of reacting, either to take a stick, chasing the dog away, or to offer some cake, making it come closer. She explained the metaphor: the same goes for a woman. If a man approaches her she is either good and tells him to go away, or she is bad and encourages him further. In the metaphor, the man is the “dog” and the initiator of adultery. In contrast, in the sharia-based laws of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States the woman is the initiator as shown in a recent case in Dubai (as in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 July 2013: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/menschen/dubai-norwegerin-zeigt-vergewaltigung-an-und-wird-verurteilt-12288166.html>).

¹³² Dongolawi living in Khartoum, p.c., 2009.

While some Dongolawi men speak of enjoying the prospect of marrying a second wife¹³³ most women dread it.¹³⁴ Still, while some Nubian men are polygamous, one Dongolawi proverb encourages them to have one wife only:

D26¹³⁵ KĀḠKON I66ĪNḠON WEPWĒḠONON NOḠMOYNOYN.

kaagkon icciingon werweegonon nogmunun.

“A snake and a scorpion do not walk together.”

- If one marries two wives he will have jealousy and fighting.

The two wives are likened to two dangerous animals, leaving open whether both wives only develop into snake and scorpion after the marriage of the second wife. However, that is not the only place where a woman is compared with a scorpion; Kenzi proverb K18, discussed below, works with a similar metaphor.

One reason for the impracticability of having two women is that a man married twice must satisfy the needs of both of them, which usually requires a degree of pretence towards each one.¹³⁶

One older Kenzi Nubian insists that in former times Nubian husbands did not beat their wives physically as women had a higher standing.¹³⁷ Still, one Dongolawi proverb talks about beating one's wife at least metaphorically:

D27¹³⁸ ĒNḠI TIWḠIḠEΔ ΔOM!

eengi tiwriiged jom!

“Beat the [unruly] wife with another!”

- If you are fed up with your wife, marry another one.
- Do not physically beat your wife; look for another kind of punishment.

This is a piece of advice to a husband whose wife does not obey, at least from his point of view. If a second wife is taken she receives some of the time and energy the husband spent on the first wife. Thereby the first wife is “beaten” metaphorically by the second wife but not physically.¹³⁹

¹³³ As heard frequently when sitting with Dongolawi men.

¹³⁴ Usually said to my wife, as a woman in Irtide, p.c., 2010. One Dongolawi man (p.c., 2014) confirmed that fear: any information a Sudanese wife obtains from her husband may be used to prevent him from taking another wife.

¹³⁵ From TAHA, “Proverbs in a Threatened Language Variety in Africa.”

¹³⁶ Kenzi from Alexandria, p.c., 2012. E.g.: each women may want to be more important than the other. That can lead the husband to exaggerating or lying to one or the other in order to satisfy their needs.

¹³⁷ Thābit Zāki, p.c., 2006

¹³⁸ From TAHA, “Proverbs in a Threatened Language Variety in Africa.”

¹³⁹ In one Kenzi village (2012) I observed a Kenzi woman who was her husband's first wife. She had broken her ankle and was limping. There were no children in her home who could support her. The husband continued to spend most of his time with his second wife.

Even if the husband is the source of marital problems or there is seemingly unresolvable disagreement between husband and wife, older women invite the wife for coffee, explaining the advantages of obedience to one's husband, and trying to solve the marriage problems.¹⁴⁰

If a Dongolawi wife became divorced, other women visited and encouraged her saying:

- D28¹⁴¹ ΚΑΛΙΛΝ ΟΥΡCΕ ΔΕCCEΝ.
 kaliln urse dessen.
 "The eater's root is green."
 ▶ There is hope for you.

Among Egyptian Nubians divorce was rarely practised and nearly always discouraged. A wife who does not suit can be lamented:

- K13¹⁴² ΩΟ ΖΑΪΡΑΝ ΔΝΓΑΡΕ!
 wo hayran angaree!
 "O weak bed!"
 ▶ I made a bad choice when marrying. But I will not take a new wife.

Comparing a woman to a "weak bed" is certainly friendlier than speaking of a "snake" and a "scorpion," as in D26.

When one Kenzi man's grandfather wanted to leave his wife, he went as far as Khartoum without telling anybody. Otherwise villagers would have worked for reconciliation and demanded his return.¹⁴³ If a Nubian husband does not deal fairly with his wife, other Nubians break their relationship even if the husband is a relative.¹⁴⁴

If a husband marries a second time his first wife may be scolded:

- K14¹⁴⁵ ΩΕΚΚΙ ΕΝΝΑ ΙΔ ΕΔΟCΟΥ, ΩΟ ΝΑΦΟΥΡΑ ΩΟ ΓΙΜΑ ΚΙΝΝΙ.
 weekki enna id edosu, wo naafuura wo giima kinni.
 "Your husband married one (another wife), o woman, o worthless woman."
 ▶ If you had been a good wife your husband would not have married a second one.

¹⁴⁰ Aḥmad Hamza, p.c., 2010.

¹⁴¹ From Shawqī 'Abd al-'Azīz, Haminaarti.

¹⁴² From "Abd al-Ṣabūr Ḥāsim, Dakke.

¹⁴³ Kenzi from Dehmiit, p.c., 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Thābit Zākī, p.c., 2012, Alexandria. While that may be regarded as a pronounced positive view of former customs, I observed a similar case.

¹⁴⁵ From Sayid al-Ḥasan, Anīiba; co-investigated with Thābit Zākī.

A *naafuura* is a woman who is married yet living separated from her husband. Note that the two nouns *naafuura* and *giima* are borrowed from Arabic which may point to a later origin.

When talking about the other wife the following expression may be used:

K15¹⁴⁶ ለNNA TIፀPI
 anna tiwri
 “my friend”

- This woman has the same husband as me. (said by a woman)

Women have the opportunity to ask for divorce, too.¹⁴⁷ Kenzi women are strongly discouraged from doing so. Other married women who hear about it, say:

K16¹⁴⁸ ለNNA IፀNA ፋBOY ፆፐር ፀለለN ለMBፈBNA ፂፀፀ.
 anna idna gabu joos walan ambaabna hoosh.
 My husband’s two vaults and not my father’s courtyard.
 ► Encouragement to a woman to stay with her husband.

K17¹⁴⁹ ለMBፈBNA ለፂፂፀ ለፐፐፐ ፐNNA ለፂፂፐ ፎNOY.
 ambaabna dahab dogoor tenna nahaas genu.
 “His [my husband’s] copper is better than my father’s gold.”
 ► Encouragement to a woman to stay with her husband.

Nowadays in Egypt divorce is on the increase.¹⁵⁰ Kenzi Nubians are not excluded from this development.¹⁵¹

Gender-related proverbs show a heavy focus in women’s lives on marriage and family. However it has to be taken into account that proverbs about leadership, politics and court ruling are nearly non-existent, so they are naturally missing in the gender domain, too.

Parenthood

Marrying and then begetting children is one of the most important tasks of any Nubian man or woman. For a Nubian it is not intelli-

146 From Khālid Karār, Siyaala.

147 According to the Dongolawi Hāmid Khabīr (p.c., 2016), who observes his society extremely well, it seems to be that nowadays Dongolawi women ask for divorce more frequently than Dongolawi men.

148 From ‘Alā al-Dīn Aḥmad, Dehmiit; co-investigated with Muḥammad Ṣubḥi.

149 From Faṭḥi ‘Abd al-Sayid, Dakke; co-investigated with Muḥammad Ṣubḥi. Note that both *dahab* and *nahaas* are Arabic loan words possibly pointing to a later origin than the proverb before.

150 Khālid Karār, p.c., 2015. He is a highly valued marriage registrar, informally also working on reconciling quarrelling partners before divorce becomes unavoidable. In his observation the main reason for marriage break-up is a lack of patience with each other.

151 Also observed by Armgard Goo-Grauer, p.c., 2017.

gible that somebody remains unmarried, for this means that he cannot live on in his children.¹⁵² One Kenzi man put it poetically: his task is to continue writing the letter his parents began.”¹⁵³

In the Dongolawi proverbs I collected thus far, fathers and parents occur more frequently than mothers. Being a father is compared with a channel, too, but a channel leading to an agricultural field, i.e., outside of the domestic domain:

D29¹⁵⁴ ΜΑΛΤΙ ΣΩΩΕΔ ΕΝ, ΒΑΓΙ ΔΟΡΡΑΝΜΟΥΝ.

malti sowwed en, baagi joorranmun.

“The channel is dried up, they do not harvest the basin.”

- ▶ The child cannot benefit before the father.

In the upbringing of the children, mothers play an important and positive role, more so than the fathers:

D30¹⁵⁵ ΒΟΥΤΤΟΥΛ ΤΙΝΕΝΓΕΔ ΑΜΜΙΔΚΙ ΚΟΥΡΙΝ.

buttul tineenged ammiidki kuurin.

“The male goat learns leaping with its mother.”

- ▶ A mother is very important. Every animal and each human learns the first lesson from its mother.

Being childless was and is a great curse. Special remedies were passed on to overcome childlessness.¹⁵⁶ The wife especially felt the consequences of not having children:

If he [the husband] should divorce her [his wife] and they have no children, he takes back all of the jewellery he bought, as well as the household articles and furniture.¹⁵⁷

However, none of the Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs collected so far reflect on a woman not bearing children.

¹⁵² As expressed by a Kenzi man working in the the “Nubian house” near Aswan, p.c., 2002. The topic popped up frequently as I did not marry till 2007.

¹⁵³ ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, p.c., 2002. He said the sentence in Arabic.

¹⁵⁴ From HX50.

¹⁵⁵ From ‘Abdullahi ‘Uthmān, Irtide; co-investigated with Samīra al-Malik.

¹⁵⁶ The Dongolawi ‘Abd al-Athīm ‘Abd al-Hamid (p.c., 2005) related that until recently a woman who was barren touched the ground in order to become pregnant. Another method to make her pregnant was to break a male goat’s penis. A deceased Kenzi from Toshka (p.c., 2005) remembered that one garlic from the male root and several garlic from the female root were put in milk, stirred, and drunk. The whole process was repeated for three days. At this point he switched to English, and explained: garlic and milk are sexual stimulants. Afterwards the wife must sleep on her back. This facilitates the passage of the sperm.

¹⁵⁷ JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, p. 69. In former times the only reason for a divorce among Nubians was barrenness (Armgaard Goo-Grauer, p.c., 2017).

There are still a few Nubian men who carry their mother's name as a nickname.¹⁵⁸ However, it is a dying custom.¹⁵⁹ Nubians explain this custom as Christian influence because Jesus is called the son of Miriam.¹⁶⁰

Similarities between parents and their children are expressed in the next two proverbs:

- D31¹⁶¹ ΕΛΟΥΜΝ ΤΩΔ ΒΩΩΙΚΑΤΤΙΝ.
elumn tood bowwikattin.
 “The crocodile’s child is a skilful swimmer.”
- Good parents have good children.
 - He is diligent like his father.

- K18¹⁶² Ι66ΪΝ ΜΙΝΓΙ Δ ΟΥΚΙ ΚΑΚΕΓΙ?
icciin mingi aa uski kakeegi?
 “A scorpion: what [kind of] young scorpion does it give birth to?” (*kakee* is a young scorpion. Its bite is worse than the bite of an old scorpion.)
- The son / child is like his / its parents in good as in bad ways.
 - The daughter’s talk and behaviour is worse than her mother’s.

According to some research participants both proverbs refer to both parents on the meaning-based level. In an alternative reading, in the first proverb the positive comparison is restricted to the father and in the second proverb the negative metaphor “old scorpion” to the mother and “young scorpion” to the daughter.

The father is to be respected, whatever his son is like. He is the origin of the children’s wealth:

- D3¹⁶³ ΙΓ ΟΥΒΟΥΡΤΙΓΙ ΟΥΚΙΝ.
iig uburtigi uskin.
 “The fire gives birth to the ash.”
- The father is good yet the son has become bad.

158 As Kenuzi “Samir Hōša” (*-1970) and “Sabry Nūra” (*-1960). Both names are the official first name or nickname plus the mother’s name. In Khartoum I met a middle-aged Dongolawi man from the northern Dongola region who also carried his own and his mother’s name when addressed by friends.

159 An about 30-year old Dongolawi man (p.c., 2007) from Magaasir Island remembers the same from when he was young. His was the last generation on the island which kept that tradition.

160 The term “son of Miriam” is not a Christian term, but a Qur’anic expression, occurring more than twenty times in the Qur’an.

161 From Aḥmad Hamza, Lebeb.

162 From Kenzi students (31).

163 ‘Abd al-‘Aal Aḥmad Hamat, 93, اكتب و اقرأ اللغة النوبية.

D33¹⁶⁴ ΖΑΝΟΥ ΒΕ, ΩΕΛΓΕΔ ΑΩΕ.

hanu bee, welged ashee.

He kills the donkey; it is the evening meal for the dog.

- He is a wealthy father whose children spend his money when he is absent.

Expectations towards a son, especially the first one, are definitely high. Grown-up sons are expected to support their parents and especially their mothers financially in old age, offering her companionship when she is ill and needs assistance.¹⁶⁵ A Kenzi man put the whole matter more bluntly: you can retire when the children are earning. It is their duty to provide financially for their parents.¹⁶⁶

However reality can be different; children may neglect their parents:

D34¹⁶⁷ ΟΥΚΕΛΝΔΙΓΟΝ ΤΩΔΙΡ ΓΑΡΙΝ, ΤΩΝΔΙΓΟΝ ΒΕΡΡΟ ΓΑΡΙΝ.

uskelndigon toodir gaarin, toondigon berro gaarin.

“While the one who gave birth [the parent] embraces the child, he [the child] embraces the wood belonging to the child.” (*uskelndi*: While “the one who gave birth” literally means the mother, the research participants related the term to both parents. *Gaar* describes a habitual action: the parents continuously think about the child; the child continuously thinks about other people and objects. *Ber*: The child metaphorically embraces the wood, representing anything materialistic. It is an anti-thesis to its parents’ concerns.)

- The heart of a mother and a father are soft (towards the child) whereas the heart of the child (towards his parents) is hard.

Advice specific to or from Kenzi Women

So far most proverbs have been taken from the Dongolawi in Northern Sudan, adding the corresponding Kenzi proverbs. There are some unique gender-related Kenzi proverbs, talking about mothers kissing their children, women hiding their beauty, and the caring mother’s advice to her child.

One Kenzi proverb uses the metaphor of a woman giving birth to challenge the stereotype of a strong husband and a weak wife:

K19¹⁶⁸ ΜΕΩΓΟΝ ΑΓΙ, Δ ΟΥΚΙΔ ΕΡΚΟΝ ΜΑΡΙCΒΟΥ.

meewgon aagi, aa uskid erkon marisbuu.

¹⁶⁴ From HX90.

¹⁶⁵ Ismā’il al-‘Abādi’s wife, p.c., 2006.

¹⁶⁶ Thābit Zāki, p.c., 2011.

¹⁶⁷ From HX109.

¹⁶⁸ From Kenzi students (45).

“While the pregnant woman gives birth, he [her husband] cries.”

- She is worried more about others than about herself.

A child, both daughter and son, needs the care of her mother; otherwise it will lack later in life:

K20¹⁶⁹ INΔΙ ΔΟΓΜΕCΑΝ, ΕΝΕΝ ΕΚΚΙ ΙΝΔΙ ΔΟΓΚΟΜΝΟΥ.

inji doogmesan, eneen ekki inji doogkomnu.

“They did not rise and kiss [you], [even] your mother did not rise and kiss you.” (*inji doog*: Previously Nubian little children were frequently taken up and kissed. If a child was not well behaved it was assumed that it was not kissed enough. Nowadays that custom is lost.)

- You have done something bad.

The proverb is said by women to a teenage child. While men know it, it is not said by men, and it is not said to little children.

Another proverb talks about hiding one’s beauty:

K21¹⁷⁰ ΔΩΙΡΚΑΝΕ ΨΑΡΤΙΝ ΤΟΓΟΡ ΒΟΥ.

ashirkanee shartin togoor buu.

“The beauty is kept below the iron.”

- You are beautiful, yet you wear such ugly clothing!

As before, physical “beauty” is not regarded as negative. Instead, it can be increased through nice clothing. In one Kenzi man’s observation¹⁷¹ Egyptian Nubians work hard, yet in the end they accumulate less money and other valuables than other Egyptians due to higher expenditure on food and clothes.

Before the *hijra* black clothing was worn for work and when fetching water.¹⁷² Roth witnessed Kenzi women in the resettlement areas wearing colourful clothes outside of their home, especially “red, pink, orange and other” colors.¹⁷³ Due to Islamization that has

169 From Ramaḍān Muḥammad, Allaagi.

170 From Kenzi students (66).

171 Thābit Zāki, p.c., 2009’

172 Based on ‘Abd al-Raḥman ‘Awaḍ, p.c., 2014. He adds that 150 years ago a Kenzi Nubian girl’s clothing covered much less, mainly her private parts, using camel leather. Later with an increase of Nubians working in Cairo, women added to their wardrobe. Each of her brothers working in Cairo presented her with some clothing. A woman without brothers was considered poor. A divorced woman had to wear black inside and outside the home. Unmarried girls used second-hand clothing.

173 ROTH, *Nubier in Alexandria*, 57.

changed to grey and black as the most common colours in ladies' dresses even when relaxing.¹⁷⁴

While social status is of lesser importance when choosing a marriage partner,¹⁷⁵ there is one proverb provided by a female Kenzi speaker talking about financial differences:

K22¹⁷⁶ ΕΝΝΑ ΓΑΤἈΝ ΓΕΔΙΡ, ΕΝΝΑ ΟCЦИΓΙ ΜΙΔΔΕΕ!

enna gataan gedir, enna ossigi middee!

"Fitting to the [winter] blanket¹⁷⁷, stretch out your leg!"

- ▶ Do not marry a wife who is richer than you.
- ▶ A wife of your financial status is sufficient, there is no need to look for a wealthier one.¹⁷⁸

The Kenzi husband is encouraged to realize that his wife, as with other women, is different than the men he deals with. With some items a woman wants more than her husband. Whereas two *jallābiyas* satisfy a Nubian man, a wife may desire a lot more garments. In these cases he should be lenient to her:

K23¹⁷⁹ ΩἈΙΕ, ΕΕCIGI ΚΑΔΑΓΕΔ ἈCΜΕΩΕ!

waye, eecigi kadaged aasmewe!

"Be careful, do not measure women with the *kada* measurement!" (*kada* is a Nubian measurement for grain, three *bar-ras*¹⁸⁰)

- ▶ Women have and do things a man / husband does not understand.
- ▶ Women have their own rules.

K24¹⁸¹ ΕΝ6IN ΟΥΛΟΥΓ ΚΟΥCΒΟΥ.

eencin ulug kusbuu.

"The ear(s) of women are open."

174 "Sha'bān Berber" (p.c., 2014), who due to his cultural knowledge is highly esteemed among villagers of West Sehel, provides an alternative interpretation. He places the origin of the preference of a dark *jallābiya* in the Kenzi villages of Dabood, Dehmiit, and Ombarkaab towards the end of the 19th century. To him it is as a sign of sorrow after the Maḥdi's troops had lost against the joint English-Egyptian forces.

175 Thābit Zāki (p.c., 2012) points out one difference between a Kenzi Nubian and a non-Nubian Egyptian marriage partner's choice: "A non-Nubian Egyptian husband marries a woman of same status. A Nubian husband takes a wife from among his relatives whatever the social status or her personality." HOHENWART-GERLACHSTEIN, "Field Research and Training of Autochthonous People," p. 205, heard the same among the Fadja: "The Fadja often stressed ... that social rank and financial level meant nothing to them."

176 From the sister of 'Abd al-Qādir 'Abd al-Raūf, Dakke.

177 In winter time Nubians use a longer blanket which covers the body and the head.

178 Other meanings do not deal with women.

179 From Muḥammad Šubḥi, Elephantine.

180 MASSENBACH, *Wörterbuch des nubischen Kunuzi-Dialektes*, p. 182. The research participants did not provide any further explanation, as that measurement is out of use.

181 From Kenzi students (49).

- Women meddle in all things. They engage in matters which are not their business.

Mothers in particular feel attached to their children, and vice-versa.¹⁸² This feeling of attachment is reflected in Kenzi proverbs only, as in the following proverb, said by women only. One can imagine a mother saying at night:

- K25¹⁸³ ΚΑΩΙΡΤΕ ΦΙΡΡΙΝ ΓΑΔΔΙΓΙ, ΟΥΓΟΫΓΙ ΨΕΓΕΡΡΟ ΝΑΛΟΥΓΙ Δ ΝΕΡΙ.
kawirte firrin gaddigi, uguugi sheggerro nalugi aa neeri.
 “[During the day] a bird flies always, at night it sleeps sleeping on a tree.”
- One cannot run around without rest. In the end, every human being sleeps.

Another problem relating mainly to mothers is:

- K26¹⁸⁴ ΖΑΝΟΥ, ΤΕΝΝΑ ΑΦΦΙΘΙΝΑ ΔΟΡΟ, ΜΙΤΤΑΡΡΟ ΔΙΓΙΡ ΤΟΨΟΥ.
hanu, tenna afficina jooro, mittarro digir toosu.
 “The donkey, because of its children, entered [jumped into] the spring.”
- A mother loves her children so much that she is willing to face danger because of them / to sacrifice anything.

Some Nubians are enthusiastic about their mothers. They were the ones who sowed love into their children’s hearts. Still today, in the Nuba Mountains when no medical help is available a mother rests her ill child next to her, offering her body warmth and supporting her child’s struggle against the illness.

A mother may voice certain opinions to her son that a wife would not dare to say to her husband:

- K27¹⁸⁵ ΚΑΤΡΕΡ ΖΑΔΑ ΩΕΚΙ Δ ΚΟΛΛΙΚΙΡΙ, ΚΟΥΛ ΙΟΜ ΤΕΝΝΑ ΚΑΔΕΓΙ Δ ΓΑΪΡΕ.
katreer haaja weeki aa kollikiri, kul yoom tenna kadeegi aa ghayre.
 “If I fix one thing firmly to the wall, he [still] changes his jallābiya daily.”
- He changes his clothing frequently without any reason.
 - He is a rich man.
 - He changes his mind frequently.

182 In one instance a Kenzi man known to me did not have any regular job any more since his mother died.

183 From Umm ‘Umar Ḥasan, Dabood.

184 From Kenzi students (25). Alternatively the proverb’s metaphor can refer to a father, brother or sister, any family member, friend, any good man or woman.

185 From Sa’id Zāki, Awaad Island.

After losing her husband instead of remarrying a widow can stay unmarried:

K28¹⁸⁶ ΖΑΝΟΥΓΙ ΚΑΘΝΑ ΑΓΑΡΡΟ ΒΙ ΔΙΓΙΡΝΑ?

hanugi kajna agarro bi digirna?

“Do you bind the donkey at the place of the horse?”

- ▶ He gives up something valuable for something less valuable.
- ▶ Advice against remarriage.

The proverb can be said in different circumstances, like when a widow is pushed to remarry, resulting in not being pressured any more. It gives the widow in Kenzi society her own status.

In conclusion, while the number of unique Kenzi proverbs is limited, they add variety and slightly more positive nuances to the Dongolawi proverbs.

Classifying Proverbs according to Their Cultural Perceptions of Femininity

Overall, there are more Dongolawi gender-related proverbs than Kenzi ones. All proverbs presented in this paper, including proverbs providing encouragement and giving advice on finding a marriage partner, which I have collected include 34 Dongolawi proverbs, compared to 28 Kenzi proverbs covering that topic.

Digging deeper the observer wonders: which proverbs define women without considering men? Which proverbs give women their own status? In order to answer such questions systematically and uncover underlying messages, I apply Hussein's classification to proverbs which provide information about the perception of femininity. There are 13 categories:¹⁸⁷

1. Proverbs that reveal society's denial of women's possession of separate psychological, material and social existence outside men;¹⁸⁸
2. Proverbs that explicitly or implicitly convey objectification of women;
3. Proverbs that portray women as sexual objects;
4. Proverbs that convey the social, biological and psychological inferiority of women;¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ From Kenzi students (13).

¹⁸⁷ HUSSEIN, “The Social and Ethno-Cultural Construction of masculinity and femininity in African Proverbs,” pp. 65–71.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 65: “Once married, a woman should exist in harmony with her husband, and what she does or thinks should not collide against her husband.”

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 67: “Women's unfitness to assume important places in society and, by implication, emphasize the necessity of their social and emotional dependence on men.”

- 5. Proverbs that directly or indirectly emphasize hegemonic masculinity;
- 6. Proverbs that convey society’s view of women’s frustration, low self-worth and inadequacy;
- 7. Proverbs that express society’s doubt about the integrity and wholeness of women;
- 8. Proverbs that convey society’s view of women as indulging in idiotic (irrational) affairs;
- 9. Proverbs that portray women as an evil sub-species of humanity;
- 10. Proverbs that show society’s view that men and women belong to separate spatial dimensions of existence;¹⁹⁰
- 11. Proverbs that encourage men to control women;
- 12. Proverbs that convey women’s expressive and supportive roles;¹⁹¹
- 13. Proverbs that show complementarity between men and women in Africa.

The following table distinguishes between Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs, sorted according to language and Jeylan Hussein’s category:

proverb #	perception of feminity	J. Hussein’s classification
D12	husband helps wife to grow up	1
D17	depending on bride’s and groom’s origin	(1)
D11	oldest daughter as ripe harvest	2
D21	unmarried woman as leavened flour	2
D22	unmarried woman as jar	2
D20	unmarried woman as vessel	2
D16	good wife is like valuable fat – bad wife is like wall	2
D27	wife can be beaten metaphorically	4, 9, 11
Do3	daughter as guest in father’s house	5
Do9	woman needing shade / protection	5
Do6	woman’s clothing	7
Do8	wife as light rope	7
D26	two wives as snake and scorpion	9
D25	woman needs protection	11
Do1	wife as part of house / family	12
Do4/Do5	beauty	–

190 Ibid, pp. 69–70: “In a gendered culture, men and women are stratified along differential patterns of space. This spatial division of the sexes usually brings about difference in the structure of male and female power, access to property, and participation in social activities. [...] The spatial stratification more often than not excludes women from having access to prestigious public spheres.”

191 Ibid, p. 71: “One theme is the existence of strong emotional connection between mother and her children.”

D15	daughter is like mother	–
D30	mother teaches the first steps	–
Ko4	daughter defined by father	(1)
K10	unmarried woman as earthen bowl	2
K11	uncovered earthen bowl	3
Ko7	husband should be proactive	5
K13	wife as weak bed	7
K24	woman meddles	8
K23	woman is different	10
K12	wife needs protection	11
K26	mother willing to sacrifice for her children	13, partly 8
Ko2	wife part of house / family	12
K22	bride not richer than husband	12
Ko1	showing great love	12
K28	wife as valuable horse; widow having its own status	–
K19	woman is stronger than man	–
Ko5	daughter as guest	–
Ko8	daughter like paternal aunt	–
K21	hiding her beauty	–

Due to the restricted number of Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs representing each category, a convincing conclusion based on a comparison of both languages and cultures is difficult to reach. Among Dongolawi proverbs there is more objectification of women (category 2) than among Kenzi proverbs. In contrast, in spite of the lower number of proverbs, there are more Kenzi than Dongolawi proverbs which convey women's expressive and supportive roles (category 12) articulated in an honouring way¹⁹² and including strong expressions of motherly care. That may be one reason why one Fadija Nubian remembers his childhood in a Nubian village from the 1930s so positively:

All the Nubian village folk were very friendly. When they saw us children, they spoke good naturedly to us, hugging and kissing us. They had lots of fun with us, joked with us and spoke sweet words to us.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Connie Fegley (p.c., 2015) regards proverbs supporting a person's dignity as a means of conflict resolution while proverbs belittling a human being as conflict generating. Thereby some gender-related Kenzi proverbs would offer the Kenzi a strong incentive for keeping peace regarding gender relations.

¹⁹³ MOHY ELDIN SHERIF, *Old Nubia*. The author was from the Fadija Nubian village of Abu Simbel. The Fadija and Kenzi Nubians were neighbors.

Nowadays that kind of atmosphere is less observed. When walking through a resettlement village Nubian parents are heard repeatedly and harshly scolding their children, copying many Egyptian teachers' behavior towards their pupils.

Only one Dongolawi proverb portrays women as an evil sub-species of humanity (category 9), however, with men partly responsible for it, especially when taking a second wife. Only one Kenzi proverb portrays women as sexual objects (category 3).

The number of Kenzi proverbs which cannot be placed in Hussein's classification exceed the Dongolawi ones, leading to a more diverse view of women in Kenzi proverbs. What could the reasons be for that slightly more positive view?

- a. Among the Kenzi I attract a different kind of speakers to work with, especially ones who are more confident towards women and therefore remember appropriate proverbs.
- b. Assuming that it is frequently men who form and use proverbs,¹⁹⁴ Kenzi men leaving their women at home and working in the Egyptian cities needed fewer proverbs to advise and scold them.
- c. Assuming that Kenzi women originate from Dongola they kept their traditions more closely and therefore resemble Old Nubian women more than their Dongolawi sisters, occupying a more prominent place in society until recently.

Regarding (a), Kenzi women are definitely more open than Dongolawi women to work with a foreign male researcher. That is shown by the number of proverbs I collected from female speakers after being introduced by a male advocate. Additional trust was built up as I visited the Aswan and the Kom Ombo areas more frequently than the Dongola reach.

Regarding (b), proverbs recommending that Kenzi men working in far-away cities marry relatives from their home village are not more frequent than corresponding Dongolawi ones where men were more likely to stay in their home village. Therefore more research as to which cultural aspects were especially influenced by migration to the cities is needed.

Regarding (c), there is not enough known about Kenzi history. Yet if the Kenuzi, or at least the Kenzi women, originate from Dongola,¹⁹⁵ there is a likelihood that they clung to their customs, just as Germans who went to Russia or America.

194 OHA, "The Semantics of Female Devaluation in Igbo Proverbs," p. 94, regards "proverb use [a]s a male art."

195 Their origin is a common topic of discussion among the Kenuzi. Some claim that their ancestors lived in Dongola, others that Arabs coming from the Arab peninsula married women from Dongola and moved northwards.

Arabic Influence on Nubian Gender Perceptions

As this section's heading would require a paper on its own, I begin by discussing the differences between proverbial advice on gender and its reality and Nubian explanations offered for those differences. The underlying consensus is that while proverbs reflect a former reality, the status of women has changed due to Arab influence. From there the discussion leads towards gender perception in Arab proverbs, exemplified by proverbs from Western Sudan.¹⁹⁶

Among Nubians, Arab influence is to a great extent blamed on television aired from stations in the Arab world. As in other countries, television definitely does not support the ethical attitudes, including towards female status, found in proverbs. However, an outsider, in this case Arabs and especially Arab television, is held responsible for anything bad happening in one's own society. Still that attitude does not lead to the television being switched off.

Already in the late 1980s the change in attitude was observed by an Egyptian non-Nubian who visited the Fadija Nubian village of Abu Simbel during his PhD research:

Women used to participate in parties and marriage festivals by dancing and singing. The young men were very upset with the interference of the conservative Muslims of the village who prohibited young women and girls from participating in any parties or festivals. Khamis [one of the villagers] said, "Teachers at school punish those girls who participate in a public party by giving them bad grades, that's why they do not participate in our parties any more."¹⁹⁷

Some of the shifting attitudes are rooted in the Nubians' understanding of Islam as became obvious when some Dongolawi men paraphrased the Dongolawi lexeme *akres*,¹⁹⁸ whose meaning cannot be easily determined:

Women do more *akres* than men as shown in the story of Adam and Eve. Both were in paradise where they could eat what they wanted, apples, chicken, etc. Just one tree was forbidden. Satan hidden as a serpent came to Adam and attempted to convince him to eat from that tree. Adam resisted. Then he went to Eve. Eve ate from that tree. They had to leave paradise. Therefore all difficulties on earth

¹⁹⁶ As taken from SALWA AHMED, *Educational and Social Values expressed by Proverbs in Two Cultures*.

¹⁹⁷ YASSER OSMAN, *The Nubian Experience*, p. 54.

¹⁹⁸ ARMBRUSTER, *Dongolese Nubian*, p. 13, translates *akres* as "unlucky, having bad luck, unfortunate, bringing bad luck."

come from women, like *akres*, and in the fire/hell there will be more women than men.¹⁹⁹

The shift is further exemplified when comparing Arab proverbs with Nubian ones:

[T]here are so many [Arabic] proverbs such as “A ghou’s proverbial cunning is not equal to that of women”; “When woman was created, the devil was delighted”; “Women’s tricks have defeated the tricks of the ghouls.”²⁰⁰

One Dongolawi man explained the main thrust of Arab proverbs related to gender as²⁰¹ (a) “a wife should honour her husband,” and (b) “the husband honours the wife as she is his children’s mother.” That puts the barren wife at a disadvantage, and the unmarried woman even more so.

Western Sudanese Arab proverbs dealing with women and their status exemplify these statements:²⁰²

Old shoes with holes are better than a woman who has a son.

Woman has broken wings.

Do not depend on women; their support is trilling and their weapon is crying.

Women are pregnant by Satan.

A woman’s hair follows the neck.

Punishing a female is like rubbing butter over the body.

199 Dongolawi men at Sajaana bus station p.c., 2003, Khartoum. Note that neither the Old Testament nor the Quran talk about Adam rejecting the fruit offered by the serpent. In the Old Testament (Genesis 3: 1–6) Adam accepts the apple from Eve, and in the Quran (sūra 7: 20–23) both Adam and Eve are tricked by Satan. The moral and mental weaknesses of women as understood by many Nubians need to be interpreted within the Quranic and hadith framework as set by the story of the prophet Yussuf (sūra 12) which talks about an Egyptian woman who tries to seduce Yussuf, son of Ya’qūb, and later invites her lady friends who are enchanted by the same Yussuf. This notion is rejected by contemporary feminist interpretations of Islām.

200 KANAANEH, “We’ll Talk Later,” p. 267.

201 HĀMID KHABĪR, p.c., 2016.

202 All proverbs taken from SALWA AHMED, *Educational and Social Values expressed by Proverbs in Two Cultures*. Western Sudan is an area also inhabited by Nubians and therefore fits well. The English translation is hers. I list all her proverbs dealing with women, except proverbs dealing with mothers. Of course, I could have added other Arab proverb collections such as BURCKHARDT, *Arabic Proverbs*. However, that would have stretched the scope of the comparison.

A woman is a leather bag full of blood; if you carry it, it pours out and if you leave it, it becomes pus.

Even if the woman were an axe she would not break the head.

Do not trust the cloud even if it has darkened and do not trust a woman even if she has fasted and prayed.

A woman is a burden whether she is married or stays at her parents' home.

Girls' marriage is a light in the house and their staying in their parents' house is oppression to the house.

Do not take your stick away from three things: a woman, a drum, and a female donkey.

Doing a favor to men brings you a good turn and doing a favor to women is water that has missed its stream.

Woman's opinion is like a leather bag full of water that has been punctured in the desert.

The above-mentioned gender-related Arab proverbs clearly have a different ring than the corresponding Dongolawi and Kenzi ones. The change observed by one Nubian²⁰³ regarding some former gender-related aspects of Nubian behavior as (a) regarding one's mother and older sisters as nearly sacred, leading to strict obedience, and (b) a boy and a girl being able walk together to another place, could be explained by the above proverbs.

Could it be that my research participants presented a glorified picture of gender roles and withheld oppressive proverbs, as they assumed a Westerner would not receive them well? I do not think so. In Salwa Ahmed's extensive collection there is not a single Arabic proverb honouring women, with the exception of mothers, as in the Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs. There is a high likelihood that such a proverb would have been listed. It cannot be refuted that Dongolawi and Kenzi proverbs have a somewhat more positive attitude towards women. While they do not plead for gender balance or emancipation within a Western mindset, some proverbs emphasize the important role women have in society. Therefore, when shifting from the Dongolawi and Kenzi Nubian languages to Arabic and replac-

203 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Abd al-Gabir, p.c., 2014.

ing the proverbs accordingly, it is no surprise that women's status is changing, too.²⁰⁴

There are voices from the Arab world who see a need for change, too: the recently deceased influential Sudanese Islamist political leader Ḥasan al-Turabi after reinventing himself in the early 2000s aimed to champion women's rights. In a table talk he said: "The Islamic movement in the Sudan took the lead [and] ... evoked religion against custom"²⁰⁵ meaning Islam on the one side, and Arab patriarchalism and non-egalitarian customs on the other. Researchers like Salwa AHMED (2005) recognize a similar line in Islam.

It remains open whether such statements will be fruitful and swing the pendulum back in favour of women.

Conclusion

There are Kenzi and Dongolawi proverbs which sound oppressive to a Western ear. Emancipation, with women getting the same rights and freedoms as men, definitely is not the aim of Nubian proverbs. In many proverbs women are not attributed a status on their own. Other proverbs show women as being different from men. Yet there are limitations to this kind of interpretation. Nubian women I talked with do not seem to mind being different from men. Instead they complement the other sex and make use of the opportunities their otherness provides. Also, as proverbs taken at face value can contradict each other, they have to be set within their context, acknowledging that they reflect wishful thinking or veil a reality which may be quite different.

In one Dongolawi family I noticed the wife, who is a home-maker and supportive of her husband (Hussein's category 12), keeping the purse with her husband's consent.

While the Shaygiya do not regard themselves as Nubians, they share some common ancestry²⁰⁶ and similar customs. Therefore I consider the following observation during two visits to Karima in the Shaygiya area, southeast of the Dongola reach, in 2000 and 2001 as typical for other Northern Sudanese women:

The only remaining son still at home had received an offer for a five-year work contract in Malaysia. His mother tore the paper and

204 Thus far I have not come across any research on the triangular relationship of language shift, loss of proverbs, and cultural shift. It would be worthwhile to investigate deeper.

205 Quoted in HALE, "Alienation and Belonging," p. 35. Islam is presented as a movement liberating women. Hale puts the quote into the context of the needs of the Sudanese military: "[W]omen are now being reshaped to fulfil both gender specific and gender generalized roles: mothers, members of militias, students, social reproducers of Islamic values, political organizers, and citizens." Also many Sudanese Nubians would not trust Ḥasan al-Turabi's statements literally.

206 Many Nubians regard the Shaygiya as Arabized Nubians. Their agricultural vocabulary consists of Nubian lexemes.

did not let him leave for such an extended period. When I was leaving for Khartoum the mother made sure that I would get enough rest until the bus came along to pick me up, waiting at the door herself. Really, the mother coordinated everything.

None of these actions were done in public; they were related to the domestic sphere. That fits a description of solving disputes: if there are domestic disputes, the ladies of the home solve them. If there are disputes between two people outside of the home, the “assembly of wise men” solve them.²⁰⁷

Before the *hijra*, Kenzi women were known for their active involvement²⁰⁸ and independence from the other sex²⁰⁹, partly due to the men working in Egyptian cities. Setting the Nile-Nubian proverbs in such an environment minimizes any oppressive atmosphere.

While the life of a Nile-Nubian woman is centred around her home, in contemporary Dongolawi and even more Kenzi Nubian society women are not just passive objects. They become active in their own ways, not always conforming to gender models of Arab-Islamic societies, as confirmed by a researcher who lived twice for extended periods among the Kenuzi in West-Aswan and later returned frequently:

Nubian women, contrary to the popular stereotype, are not prevented from engaging in important decision making processes but are expected to contribute their knowledge and expertise to them.²¹⁰

Proverbs and historical sources show that there is one foundational limitation for women and gender relations that has remained unchanged. Women may not act indecently or damage the family's honour as defined by men.

There definitely is multi-faceted change based on redefinitions of what is decent and what is indecent behaviour. One kind of change is due to influence on gender from Arab proverbs and culture. Good and bad behaviour are defined in Arabic terms which, of course, are shifting, too.

Another reason for the shift in Nubian women's status is that instead of working as equal partners in agriculture, women's main sphere of responsibility became geographically separated from that of their husbands, as in the Funj kingdom described before.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Kamāl Hīsayn, p.c., 2005.

²⁰⁸ CALLENDER, “Gender Relations in Kenuz Public Domains,” p. 197: “[W]omen were by no means passive counters.”

²⁰⁹ Goo-Grauer, p.c., 2015.

²¹⁰ JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, p. 16.

²¹¹ That does not mean that formerly within agriculture men's and women's work necessarily was the same; it just had more points of contact. Nowadays even in agriculture husband and wife seldom work together as Nubian women are less willing to take on agricultural work (Dongolawi farmer, p.c., 2015) or in the Kenzi resettlement villages live too far away from

Changes in work patterns resulted in a change in family structure, a split between the private (home) world and the public (work) world. While the husband is working outside the home or sitting in a teahouse, the wife stays mainly inside the home bringing up their children, or preparing for the husband's return from his outside jobs and responsibilities. Even when the wife is working, too, which while still less frequent among Nubian women than among Arab women, is increasing, she carries nearly all domestic responsibilities.

Nubian men who feel connected to Nubian history and language discuss who the initiator for culture change is: men or women? Among many men the fault is placed on women. However, why should a woman favor a development which diminishes her status? In the Kenzi language area it is two young women who are starting Kenzi language activities, and no men. Instead, girls and women seem to accept such opportunities as formal education and new work opportunities more quickly, which of course also change culture. The discussion carries on, among researchers and the Nubians themselves.

the fields (see YASSER OSMAN, *The Nubian Experience*, p. 59). Due to formal school education, which Nubian girls take seriously, they prefer an office job after graduating from school or even university. During my travels to the Nubian villages I also observed a decrease in women working in the fields during the last fifteen years.

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Tales from Two Villages: Nubian Women and Cultural Tourism in Gharb Soheil and Ballana

Zeina Elcheikh

1. Introduction

Nubians, who have historically lived in the region stretching between the south of Aswan in southern Egypt and Dongola in central Sudan, and developed there a civilization dating back to 8000 BCE, have long been considered as a distinct population. They have been divided, on the basis of linguistic differences, into two main groups: Kenuzi–Dongolawi (Mattokki–Andaandi) and Nobiin (Mahas–Fadijja). In their (historical) geographical setting, Nubians had developed an intimate relationship with the river Nile, which was not just their only source of water, but the center of their daily activities and rituals, which were celebrated in a close association with the river. This lasted until the effort to regulate the flow of water in the Nile increased, first by the Old Aswan Dam in 1902 and its subsequent raisings in 1912 and 1933, and later by the High Dam in the 1960s and the resulting permanent lake which submerged 500 km of the Nubians' historical land.

The construction of the High Dam in Aswan threatened many historical sites with imminent submersion under the lake, and made them the focus of UNESCO and the international community in the greatest archaeological rescue operation of all time.¹ In order to save them, monuments and artifacts were displaced from their original settings. Colossal stone temples, such as Abu Simbel and Philae, were dismantled and relocated to safer locations where they were put together again, while others were transported to far-flung museums around the world as a reward to various countries

1 MOHAMED, "Victory in Nubia: Egypt," p. 5.

for their assistance.² However, while the world gathered to save the monuments of Nubia, no such attention was really paid to the fate of Nubians and to their cultural heritage, strongly connected through history to their original homeland, and which was doomed to be submerged.³ As a consequence of the traumatic experience of losing their homeland forever, “Nubian” has risen as a collective identity in Egypt.⁴

As we look at the present situation of Egyptian Nubians, their strategies for earning a living have turned them away from Old Nubia – and, for many, also away from New Nubia [...]. What then of Nubian culture and ethnicity? Much of our discussion has centered around the loss of language, traditional customs and ceremonies, even the commercialization of dance and music. Yet Nubians are far from disappearing as a distinctive part of Egyptian society.⁵

Culture and environment are interrelated, interwoven, and integrated, and places, like heritage, are socially constructed.⁶ Yet, societies change over time and accordingly their culture changes with them. Signals of the past are being preserved to satisfy images of the future, especially when the present offers no desirable ones, but it is not merely about saving old things but also about maintaining a response to them. This response, however, can be transmitted, lost, or modified,⁷ because generations overlap constantly, and preserving a whole context in itself is not possible.

However, change could be dealt with more effectively when a partial continuity is preserved simultaneously, not only of things and places but also of people.⁸ As far as tangible aspects are concerned, the extinction of a heritage, not a people, is relatively simple: intangible heritage has been shown to be “much less amenable to such direct action.”⁹ The Nubians’ gradual loss of their land, their labor migration, the forced displacement, and assimilative governmental policies, made them practice their values in a different setting than the original one. New practices accelerated changes in their culture and traditional economies, changes which were later complemented by the introduction of cultural tourism activities.

2 USICK, “Adventures in Egypt and Nubia,” p. 118.

3 ELCHEIKH, “Beyond the Borders: Nubian Culture and Cultural Tourism.”

4 FERNEA, “The Blessed Land,” p. 66.

5 FERNEA AND ROUCHDY, “Contemporary Egyptian Nubians,” p. 380.

6 TURAN, “Review: Anthropology and Architecture” p. 355; ASHWORTH, GRAHAM, and TUNBRIDGE, *Pluralising Pasts*, p. 54.

7 LYNCH, *What Time Is This Place?* p. 53.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

9 ASHWORTH, GRAHAM, and TUNBRIDGE, *Pluralising Pasts*, pp. 105–107.

Ethnic Tourism and Authenticity

The distinctive traditions and customs of ethnic communities have attracted not only cultural anthropologists, but also tourists. Consequently, ethnic tourism has been increasingly developed as a particular trend of cultural tourism:

[W]ith the broad integration of ethnicity into tourism worldwide, the representation, consumption and experience of ethnicity has become fashionable. “Ethnic” has become a popular tourist icon and has been consumed and promoted locally and afar, from ethnic restaurants, neighborhoods and markets to ethnic museums, themed parks and tourist villages.¹⁰

Nubian culture in Southern Egypt seems to be no exception. Today in its quasi-original settings, it has become a new tourist attraction. In Aswan, the internationally famed tourist destination, “Nubian” has turned into a brand used even by Egyptian guides and dealers to attract visitors. Packaged tours to the South have started to schedule Nubian villages, and have also played a role in making the culture of Nubians polished and (over)simplified so that they become easier for tourists, especially foreigners, to understand and consume.

Tourists in the first place seek experiences, and what is “real,” “truthful,” and “authentic” is definitely a major tendency driving ethnic tourism.¹¹ Therefore, authenticity is a subject of unending discussions caused by ambiguities coming from a lack of how to measure and compare it, and assessing it is therefore, “extremely ambivalent.”¹² Yet, “if keenly seeking ‘the real thing’ is a dilemma for the tourists, it is even more so for those putting their cultures and heritages on display for touristic consumption.”¹³ On the one hand, activities associated with this flourishing tourism trend have created new job opportunities for Nubians. On the other hand, the tourism industry has caused visible changes in the lifestyle and customs of the community in some villages.

Approach and Methodology

This paper was a part of a Master’s Thesis in integrated urbanism at Stuttgart University. Work focused on the impacts of cultural tourism on identity and income in the Nubian villages of Gharb Soheil and Ballana, as well as on the role of the Nubian museum in Aswan.

10 YANG and WALL, *Planning for Ethnic Tourism*, p. 9.

11 XIE, *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism*, p. xiii; FRANKLIN, “The Tourist Syndrome,” p. 208.

12 LOWENTHAL, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 18.

13 MACDONALD, *Memorylands*, p. 111.

Figure 1. Painting in Aswan in the tourist corniche area, showing a Nubian woman with traditional jewelry (Zeina Elcheikh, 2013).



The fieldwork took place in March 2013, and included interviews and meetings with Nubians from both villages, tourism professionals, museum officials, and tourist guides.

A small pool of initial informants helped in nominating, through their social networks, other participants; some were spoken to directly or via telephone. The informants (Nubian community, tourist guides, and expert groups) were encouraged, through a phenomenological methodology, to describe their experiences, thoughts, and memories. During the field visits, secondary meetings with several Nubian women took place. In this paper I draw on accounts of two groups of women, informally initiated by the two main female informants in the two different settings, in which they describe their experiences and reflect on the flourishing trend of “Nubian” cultural tourism, as an observer and as an active contributor.

Finally, it is important to mention that the sample of Nubian interviewees in this paper is not large, and the qualitative phenomenological research’s data, and the theme itself, are subjective. Moreover, the work did not include narratives about cultural tourism activities in the Sudan due to the lack of time and travel difficulties. Therefore, the ability to generalize the findings of this work is limited to the Nubian communities in southern Egypt, especially the two studied villages.

Nubian Women and Society

Nubians were known for their labor migration, due to the shortage of agricultural land, and because there were few other resources to exploit.¹⁴ Men voluntarily went to the urban centers, worked there

14 SCUDDER, “The Economic Basis of Egyptian Nubian Labor Migration,” p. 159.

for small wages, and returned to Nubia when they had accumulated some savings.¹⁵ There is a general image of Nubians in urban Egypt: they were thought to work only in service occupations such as cook, doorkeeper, and waiter. Nubian women have traditionally had the right to earn additional money as well.¹⁶

Although in Nubian society social segregation of males and females is not rigorously practiced as in many other traditional settings in the region, the labor migration of men resulted in a high proportion of working woman in Nubia. The society became largely a land of women, children and elderly men, as the Nubian author Idris Ali describes in *Dongola: A Novel of Nubia*:

[A]nd her waiting grew long because she was like the other forsaken women of Nubia, all of whom were waiting for men who had journeyed far away, to the cities of Egypt, the Arab lands, and overseas. [...] Women. Women. Wherever she went, they were all she saw, crowding into the markets, streets, parties, funerals, the telephone and telegraph office, the railroad station, at the public water spigot and sitting on benches, tense and argumentative, quarrelsome, and always shouting.¹⁷

In the past, Nubian women raised sheep and goats to sell, which helped support them when their husbands were away from home as labor migrants, but which they continued to do even with their husbands present at home.¹⁸ Even at present, Nubian women have a section in the Aswan marketplace reserved for them, where they sell eggs and fowl.¹⁹ Furthermore, women had a great role in Nubian society. They struggled to survive while their husbands left to the urban centers for work: they farmed, restored, and decorated the house. Moreover, they became, with the elderly, the main channels through whom traditions were channeled to the new generation.²⁰

Although the money that a woman makes is regarded as hers, a Nubian woman usually uses her money for her children, but she may also invest in some gold jewelry or in enlarging the house her family is living in.²¹ Women participated in several stages of the house construction, including plastering the walls and creating a smooth surface which they filled with traditional decorative paintings. They also produced plates and fans from material they would have found in the surroundings: straw, clay, etcetera. They also made bead

15 GEISER, "Some Differential Factors Affecting Population Movement," p. 188.

16 JENNINGS, "The Nubian Response to Tourism."

17 ALI, *Dongola*, pp. 93–94. See also ODDOUL, *Nights of Musk*.

18 JENNINGS, *The Nubians of West Aswan*, p. 72.

19 Ibid.

20 MERDAN, *Development Concepts and Implementation Strategies for New Settlements*, p. 104.

21 JENNINGS, "The Nubian Response to Tourism."

necklaces and bracelets which have been generally replaced, after the displacement, by a commercial version available in the markets.

As expected in a displacement of such magnitude, the first months were tremendously difficult in several parts of New Nubia. Yet, one year later, a dramatic change was reported in New Nubia, and a “new air of optimism” was stated to be palpable.²² Markets started to be run; people commuted daily between the new settlements and to Aswan; and many women were “busy with handicrafts introduced by the Egyptian Ministry of social affairs.” Many houses were adjusted in traditional Nubian styles by reasserting basic elements of their past architecture, and the bond between Nubian traditions and Nubian architecture has reappeared. Nubian women should be given credit for taking the initiative and participating in a widespread practice in most of the villages “to change the government house to Nubian homes.”²³

However, this “air of optimism” does not seem to have continued. For instance, the remodeling of houses did not go on for long, as people chose to spend money on what they could take with them, if actually they had to move again one day, rather “than wasting money on houses they do not even own.”²⁴ The resentment of Nubians toward the Dam was expressed in different forms of the arts, in which women played a significant role: music, songs, tales, poems, house decoration, paintings, and drawings on clothes, especially on bed sheets and handkerchiefs.²⁵

(Nubian) Cultural Tourism: Between *Now* and *Then*

In the 1980s, tourists who visited the botanical garden near Aswan started to enter the neighboring Nubian houses and get a cup of tea. Jennings, who observed the trend in the village of Gharb Aswan over a period of twenty-five years of fieldwork in Nubia mentioned:

[V]isitors have been coming to the west bank of Aswan for more than a century in order to see the pharaonic tombs and the monastery of St. Simeon, and Nubians have been meeting tourists there in order to offer aid and advice, or just out of curiosity, for almost as long. It was not until the High Dam was built, however, that the tourist industry in Aswan began to bloom.²⁶

22 FERNEA and KENNEDY, “Initial Adaptations to a New Life for Egyptian Nubians,” pp. 252–253.

23 FAHIM, “Community Health Aspects of Nubian Resettlement in Egypt,” p. 270.

24 FERNEA and ROUCHDY, “Contemporary Egyptian Nubians,” pp. 373–374.

25 SALIH, “Nubian Culture in the 20th Century,” p. 419.

26 JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, p. 123.



Figure 2. Nubian women performing with the Nubian "Aragide" group at the Egyptian Center for Culture and Arts (ECCA)/Makan (Courtesy of the ECCA in Cairo).

Since the late 1980s, a growing interest in Nubian houses and culture in Egypt has been noticed, as "Nubian tourist guides and tourist shops" became "a regular feature in Aswan, added to the felluccas, which have for many years offered boat rides to foreign visitors." As a consequence of the interest in Nubian traditions shown by the tourism industry in southern Egypt, some commodification was reported to have taken place as a "packaging of expressive forms for the consumption of others," with Nubian dance acts featuring in every hotel and night club of Aswan, as well as certain ones back in Cairo.²⁷

The establishment of the Nubian Museum was of major importance to acknowledge Nubians and their heritage in Egypt. The museum was opened to the public in November 1997, and captured the attention of tourists and scholars who wanted to explore the rich history of Nubia. Moreover, it has become the main attraction in Aswan, not to be missed by any visitor to Southern Egypt. The total area of the site is 50,000 sq.m., consisting of 7,000 sq.m. for the museum's ground floor area, and 43,000 sq.m. allocated to the outdoor exhibit amphitheater and green areas. The museum's collections host artefacts excavated during the UNESCO campaign. These artefacts range in time from prehistory, through Egyptian domination, to the Christian and Islamic periods. The more modern part representing Nubian culture is found in the ethnographic exhibit. The outdoor area includes a sample of a typical traditional Nubian house, with its architecture and decorations.²⁸

27 FERNEA and ROUCHDY, "Contemporary Egyptian Nubians," p. 378.

28 ELCHEIKH, "Outside the Walls of the Nubia Museum," pp. 32–33, 36.

Figure 3. Part of the ethnographic diorama at the Nubia Museum in Aswan showing Nubian women in front of the traditional Nubian house (Zeina Elcheikh, 2013).



More recently, some Nubian villages started to attract more visitors. As tourism blossomed, many Nubian women in these villages, who used to sell their crocheted items and beaded necklaces, could no longer keep up with the growing demand of tourists, and started to sell Egyptian-made (sometimes China-made) items. Yet, the successful experience of “Nubian” cultural tourism has been assessed on the financial benefits it has brought to the communities, which is, accordingly, worth encouraging and promoting in other Nubian villages.²⁹

Following the uprising in 2011, the struggling state of the tourism industry in Egypt as a whole seemed to be one of the biggest threats to the country’s future. Tourism provides direct jobs for nearly three million people in Egypt, critical income to more than 70 industries and 20 percent of the state’s foreign currency, now desperately needed to prop up the plummeting Egyptian pound.³⁰ In 2010, prior to the political unrest in Egypt, fourteen million international tourists were reported to have visited the country. Yet, early 2011, when former President Hosni Mubarak was forced out, international tourism declined by forty-five percent.³¹ Today, Egypt is still recovering from the worst instability in decades, after the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013. Despite reassurances from the Egyptian Tourism Ministry, the usual masses are keeping their distance.³²

29 Ahmad Saleh Ahmad, the General Director of the Abu Simbel monument & Nubian Temples at Supreme Council of Antiquities (telephone interview, 4 June 2013).

30 FAHIM, “Egyptians Struggle As Wary Tourists Stay Away.”

31 GUERRIERO, “The Number: 45%.”

32 ASSAD, “Egypt Travel.”



Figure 4. With Awada and her son at their house in Ballana (Zeina Elcheikh, 2013).

Tourism in Aswan and the Nubian villages has also had its share of this turbulent situation. The flourishing Nubian cultural tourism, and the profitable economic success it made for its communities seem to be threatened. This has forced many Nubians working in the industry to increase their advertising and organizing of festivals and tourism-related activities. Some of these activities were initiated with the aim of reviving the role of Nubian women in the decoration and wall painting of traditional houses.³³

Tales from Two Villages

The Nubian Village of Ballana

Ballana is a Fadijja Nubian village, and one of the villages displaced to Kom Ombo (around 50 km to the north of Aswan) because of the High Dam. The old Ballana was closer the Sudanese border, a few kilometers away from the Temples of Abu Simbel. The traditional houses in Old Ballana were of the typical Nubian style: several spatial rooms around an open courtyard or community room, and traditional decorations. Today, most of the houses are those cement-block houses issued by the government.

Nubians in the village live partially from state employment, while others run businesses in the Aswan area. Arab Gulf countries are on the top of the list for young men in Ballana seeking jobs. Tourism played a big role in the village, either as a primary or secondary source of income. Some of the Nubians go to Aswan to earn their living, while others head to further urban centers, and some to the Red Sea to work in tourism facilities and resorts.

³³ May Gad-Allah, the contact person and coordinator of the festival (telephone interview, 1 July 2013).

Figure 5. View in Ballana (Zeina Elcheikh, 2013).



Awada is the head of the informant family in Ballana. Her husband, who passed away a few years ago, owned a boat and worked in tourism near Aswan. She was nine years old when she left the old village, and recalled how they were put with their belongings in the boat. Awada also mentioned how people got very ill, and how many died after this huge shift in their lives. She also talked about how she had been involved in a handicrafts workshops initiated thirty years ago by the government after the displacement. However, this did not last for long:

Why were we all gathered to produce all these hand-made items? We did not need them all. Perhaps it was the government's way to keep us busy, instead of thinking of our fate.

Today her crafts serve as good gifts for newlywed friends and relatives. She has said, however, that things are not done the same way anymore, that traditions have changed. Marriages were arranged in the past by parents, for instance, and the groom was not allowed to talk to his bride before their wedding. Now things are completely different. Her mother, in her mid-seventies, added, although she did not speak Arabic, that daughters and granddaughters are dressed like other Egyptian girls, and their traditional *jarjar* are only worn at home. She considers the younger generations more flexible at dealing with the changes which her community has been gone through in the displacement.

Awada found the bridal scene and the jewelry section in the Nubia Museum the best among the others. They seemed to her an almost accurate presentation of weddings she used to attend in the old village. She was amazed by the pictures of saving Abu Simbel

and other monuments, and wondered, at the same time, why nobody showed the old villages being evacuated, when they were all forcibly displaced to Kom Ombo.

The youngest daughter wanted to visit the museum to know what the government would tell foreigners about Nubians. Just the museum's name, Nubian Museum, is for her a source of pride and an official acknowledgement of Nubians' culture and existence in Egypt. She expressed her dislike of the presentation of Nubians in the media, especially on television: "When an actor wants to play a Nubian's role, he immediately starts to talk a broken Arabic." However, she had a pleasant feeling, and was even proud to see the diorama, which reminded her of her mother's and grandmother's stories about Old Nubia. Although she believes that the right of Nubians to return to their geographical settings is not being seriously taken by the government, her mother still considers it a right, and even a long-awaited dream.

Awada emphasized that if tourists wanted to see Nubians and to learn more about their lives and traditions, they should come to see them in their houses and not in a museum. She interrupted herself, however, saying:

[B]ut here there is nothing to attract tourists. They will definitely need hotels, restaurants, and other facilities. It is just a desert here, we don't even have a view on the Nile.

She mentioned that an exhibition was made decades ago for tourism purposes, but the displacement villages cannot compete with the already established facilities and attractions in Aswan and in its direct proximity. The strong competition in the tourism business among Nubians and Egyptians near Aswan has forced her son to make his living in tourism but in Sharm El-Sheikh and the Red Sea resorts.

The Nubian Village of Gharb Soheil

Gharb Soheil is a Kenuzi Nubian village, located on the western bank of the Nile, around 15 kilometers to the south of Aswan. Although part of the village's population is engaged in diverse occupations (agriculture, state employment, trade, etc.), the majority is involved in tourism in one way or another. Gharb Soheil has become a part of packaged tours to Aswan, organized through prior arrangements between travel agencies in Cairo and Nubians in the village.

The majority of the tourist locations are concentrated in a small part of the village on the Nile's bank. Nubian (guest)houses and other rental rooms are dispersed within the village. The women living far from the tourist enclave go there to sell their handmade products

Figure 6.
Religious
decorations at
Iman's house in
Gharb Soheil,
showing a mosque
(Zeina Elcheikh,
2013).



(mainly beaded necklaces and bracelets, head coverings, bags, and other crocheted products), together with additional Egyptian-made and even Chinese-made souvenirs which could be found anywhere. Many women in the village make henna tattoos and dyes for brides as part of their ceremonies. This has nowadays become a special service offered to female tourists too.

Iman, the key female informant in the village, who earned some money from doing henna for brides, did not yet consider offering her services to female tourists coming to Gharb Soheil. Her aunt Fatheya – who did not speak Arabic but wanted to serve a cup of tea and some traditional bread – mentioned that she rarely goes out and heard only from Iman and other relatives that foreigners (tourists) come to the village. She has not yet met any of them, despite the fact that a Nubian house, run as guesthouse with rental rooms for tourists, is a few meters away from her. Iman explained that tourists usually come in organized groups, for an all-inclusive service in the village. It is usually arranged beforehand between the Nubians and agencies in Cairo. Other Nubians who recently started their tourism business also started to get more independent by creating webpages and Facebook pages to advertise their services, and show pictures of the village and the Nubian houses.

A friend of Iman who joined the meeting, and who lives uphill in the village, far away from the Nile and the tourist area said that “it is far away from what would attract tourists.” She believes that tourists are being attracted by the decorated Nubian houses, which they see at first when they arrive in the village. She mentioned that tourism has brought lot of benefits to those who are directly working in it, but she added, “I still cannot imagine myself charging anyone entering my house for visiting me and drinking a cup of tea. We



Figure 7. German tourists in the tourist's area in Gharb Soheil (Zeina Elcheikh, 2013).

were always known for our generous hospitality, and I do not want to lose this quality.”

Iman did not seem to be bothered by the tourists coming to the village, mainly because she does not encounter them. However, she mentioned that some of her neighbors felt unhappy with the new habits which have appeared among young men working with the tourists, especially drinking alcohol and smoking, which she considered against their religion and belief as well. Cultural exchange between Nubians in Gharb Soheil and foreign tourists imported some modernized patterns. Marwa, a woman who helps her husband in the tourism business they run in the village, has shown her satisfaction with the profit they gained from tourism. However she is afraid that her kids will become influenced by the behavior and dressing fashion of the foreign tourists. Women in the village are dressed in a very conservative way, while female tourists, especially foreigners, are not properly dressed and even sometimes wear swimming suits.

Discussion

The visit to the two villages showed that the residents running businesses, or at least engaged in tourism activities, are those frequently encountering tourists. On the other hand, those living in the village uphill in Gharb Soheil, or in displaced Ballana, rarely meet visitors. This is especially the case with women who are relatively more isolated, and hardly ever notice the presence of foreigners. In Gharb Soheil, where the tourism business is blossoming, unlike in Ballana, Nubians who live in the proximity of the tourist area or running their business there have continuous chances to meet tourists, who usually go only to this area. This creates a greater opportunity for

them, especially women, to sell their goods and offer services, and consequently increase or generate incomes.

Traditional Nubian houses were known for their architecture. They were usually spacious, with several large rooms around a courtyard for extended family members and guests. The main façade of the house was usually decorated with colorful geometric symbols referring to a variety of Nubian beliefs. Although the houses in Ballana are those made by the government for the displacement, one can see modest alteration within the house: decorating walls with hand-made plates, the presence of *zir*,³⁴ and few religious decorations on the facades.

The wall paintings in the region of Aswan are no longer a part of Nubian tradition, as they used to be. Today, they are done by men and professionals, sometimes of Nubian descent but more often by Egyptians. They became popular only with the increased tourism there and are intended specifically to attract the attention of visitors. Their motifs and styles today have hardly anything in common with the type of house decoration done formerly by the Nubian women in the old villages. In the new villages near Kom Ombo wall paintings are nowadays obsolete.³⁵

However, these traditional features still exist in many houses in Gharb Soheil, but the majority of them were made with a focus on shape and form to retain a “Nubian” atmosphere for tourists. This is also seen in many decorated façades that have lost the symbolic significance of traditional decorative patterns, and have become a kind of advertisement.

The *beit Nubi* looks more like a bazaar than it does like a home, but tourists cannot be expected to know that. It has just enough touches of the traditional to make it seem exotic for foreigners, yet enough of domestic that it can appear to be a “real” Nubian home.³⁶

In Gharb Soheil, the more one comes closer to the tourists’ area, the more houses are being decorated with motifs, sometimes exaggerated, not like the traditional symbols seen in traditional Nubian decorative arts, but more commercial.

The beaded necklaces and accessories, which Nubian women were known for, in addition to the colorful crocheted bags, hats, and traditional plates and baskets, had been used in the past in their daily life, and for decorating their houses, mainly the nuptial rooms. The Nubian interviewees – both in Gharb Soheil and Ballana – stated that these crafts have often become gifts, especially for their non-

³⁴ Water jars.

³⁵ Armgard Goo-Grauer, e-mail communication, 30 July 2013.

³⁶ JENNINGS, *Nubian Women of West Aswan*, p. 127.



Figure 8. Nubian house in the tourists' area in Gharb Soheil (Zeina Elcheikh, 2013).

Nubian friends, as a part of introducing their culture. However, the bazaars in Gharb Soheil are replete with all kind of souvenirs to be found in almost every shop in Aswan or even in Cairo, apart from the Nubian crafts and some masks and wooden sculptures showing sub-Saharan African features.

The establishment of a Nubian museum was a recognition of the part played by Nubians in Egypt. Yet it makes the recreated image of Nubians in the museum debatable: “living” culture and “museumified culture” are often very different things.³⁷ The showcased picture of Nubians and the real one are not quite the same. The first is a snapshot of a Nubian community at a certain period of time, while the second reveals a continuity of inherited traditions, despite all the changes that the community has gone through. Nubians in the real world outside the ethnographic exhibit live their daily lives differently.

Museumification aims at depicting perceived deviant groups as harmless and non-threatening. Their heritages are contained and marginalised as curious, colourful and somewhat quaint survivals from the past, which can be treated as museum artifacts or folklore. In the museumification of heritage, the intent is to break any possible connection between the viewer's present and the displayed past. The exhibits are presented as interesting for their antiquity, ingenuity, beauty or strangeness, but they possess no intrinsic ideological message or any significance to the present or the future.³⁸

37 ELCHEIKH, “Interpretation in Cultural Tourism: Nubian Culture in Southern Egypt,” p. 26.

38 ASHWORTH, GRAHAM, and TUNBRIDGE, *Pluralising Pasts*, p. 111.

One prominent opinion of Nubians, when facing exhibits of pre-Dam life, appears mainly among those who experienced the displacement; they believe it is an inaccurate image given to tourists. The ethnographic exhibit is, in a way, a tangible interpretation of stories told by older generations of Nubians who used to live like what is seen in the diorama. However, many Nubians, mainly women, have not yet visited the museum.

Nubians were wrenched out of their original context twice: first when they were uprooted from their historical homeland, and secondly when their picture in the museum, and in the public mind, dates back to pre-Dam times. It could cause disappointment for tourists to see the traditional Nubians' mud-brick houses, clothes and accessories only in museums, while finding out that Nubians in real life live in modern houses made of concrete and wear more westernized clothes.³⁹

Tourism is parasitic upon culture, to which it contributes nothing. If taken to the extreme, the economic commodification of the past will so trivialise or distort it that arguably this can result in the destruction of the heritage resource, which is its *raison d'être*.⁴⁰

McIntosh, Hinch, and Ingram found that the cultural experience offered in a commodified tourist setting may be authentic or a careful representation of certain aspects of a group's identity.⁴¹ Moreover, the "ostensibly more personalized relationship" between the consumer and the producer "is a performance of the authenticity of relationship."⁴² Authenticity is often referred to as genuineness, and in the context of cultural tourism it needs to be further discussed. Locals started to use imported Chinese- and Egyptian-made products instead of their traditional handmade crafts in a response to the increasing demand accompanied by the flow of tourists. However, crafts are continually being produced for both use by locals and sale to visitors. Perhaps one could argue that cultural tourism has helped keep them alive.

Nubians are well-known for choosing certain aspects of a new thing and incorporating it into their already existing culture. So we must be careful when we ask what threatens the authenticity of Nubian culture.⁴³

39 ELCHEIKH, "Outside the Walls of the Nubia Museum," p. 36.

40 ASHWORTH, GRAHAM, and TUNBRIDGE, *Pluralising Pasts*, p. 43.

41 MCINTOSH, HINCH, and INGRAM, "Cultural identity and Tourism," pp. 39–42.

42 MACDONALD, *Memorylands*, p. 124.

43 Anne M. Jennings, e-mail interview, 11 April 2013.

Cultures are not stagnant, and they are constantly reevaluating and remarking themselves and their past, which is a potent segment of their identity.⁴⁴ The fact that many women cannot communicate in Arabic reveals how keen they are to maintain their culture. Yet, as one sophisticated Nubian leader stated the dilemma, "we want to modernize our houses but not our values." It now seems more difficult than ever before to accomplish this, but perhaps the practicability with which Nubians have solved their problems in the past will enable them to reconcile the many conflicts inherent in their new life.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Cultural tourism offers a strong motivation to save identity and to create economic benefits. However, its sustainability depends on how much local community is involved, and in which ways. Many local Nubians working in tourism started to depend increasingly on incomes they earn from tourist activities. This creates a great challenge to make a profitable tourism business run without damaging its basis: the culture itself with its tangible and intangible features. However, with the sharply declining tourism industry in Egypt as a whole, Nubians working in this industry are facing more challenges. The risk that Nubian culture in Southern Egypt could be facing through cultural tourism is the loss of the simple social values of hospitality, and the loss of the ideal image of the Nubian village which might become debased and just a tourist's gaze. Yet Nubian villages continue to sustain their authenticity revealed by the presence of Nubians themselves, the continuity of their traditions and customs in their daily life, their insistence on maintaining their language, and keeping their identity, an identity which has been historically shaped by interaction with outsiders, seen today as tourists.

44 ZIMMERMAN, "The Past is a Foreign Country," n.p.

45 FERNEA and KENNEDY, "Initial Adaptations to a New Life for Egyptian Nubians," p. 262.

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Community Sharing: Three Nubian Women, Three Types of Informal Co-ops

Maher Habbob

Rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCA), a third-world phenomenon common in South America, Asia, and Africa, are described by F.J.A. Bouman as “the poor man’s bank, where money is not idle for long but changes hands rapidly, satisfying both consumption and production needs.”¹ ROSCAs take different forms depending on geographical and social context. In the past, the importance of these associations was hardly acknowledged by economists, but now their contributions “to the larger economy are now being reassessed, not just in Africa but throughout the world. Despite earlier forecasts of their imminent demise, they have not only survived but become increasingly important in many national and transnational economies, interwoven in complex and diverse ways with more formal means of saving and consumption.”² Known as *cundinas* in Mexico, *hagbads* in Somalia, and *sunduqs* in the Sudan, in Egyptian Nubia they are called *game’yas*.

In Nubian villages, from the late 1960s until today, many people participate in this *game’ya*, or monthly money sharing pool, which is a unique micro-economic system in Egypt that was adopted by Nubians, shortly after the building of the Aswan High Dam and mass relocation. Small, gender-mixed groups of coworkers or neighbors pool their money to form a money-sharing co-op. They each agree to pay a specific sum into the monthly pool. This pool continues until each person has received the accumulated monthly distribution of the fund. One person, usually a woman, manages the collection and distribution of the fund. As a matter of fact, approximately 75% of the participants are women. Most pools normally have ten to twenty

1 BOUMAN, “Indigenous Savings and Credit Societies in the Developing World,” p. 10. ,

2 KENYON, “Rotating and Escalating Credit in the Female Domain,” p. 2.

participants, but sometimes the number of participants can go up to thirty.

This is how the monthly money sharing pool functions: if the monthly amount is 10 Egyptian pounds (LE) and there are 10 participants, this means that each participant would receive 100 LE on a specific month. After everyone gets their share, the pool starts all over again. New people are sometimes added to the pool to replace those who no longer want to participate. Participants always have an economic reason behind their joining, and for them it is a monthly financial commitment. To sum up, this is how pools work:

1. A person is in financial need and is willing and able to join a pool.
2. They find a pool that suits their monthly income and will satisfy this upcoming need in a timely manner (a specific amount of money/person/month).
3. After there are enough participants, the manager/organizer randomly draws a name to find out exactly when each participant will receive his or her share.
4. In case one of the participants is in dire need of money before his or her turn, this person would ask the manager/organizer to see to it that the next recipient switches his turn with the one who needs the money sooner than expected.

The three following examples are from Thomas Wa Afia (توماس و عافية), my Nubian village, which is located in Esna, 55 kilometers south of Luxor. With a population of about 10,000, it is one of the Nubian villages that was relocated in 1963/1964 because of the building of the Aswan High Dam.

Fatima Jamal Abdullah, or Fatom Jaara as people call her, a childless widow in her eighties who lives with her married niece, has been managing a *game'ya* since 1970. The idea started with women who had been receiving a pension from the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the tradition still continues to this day. In 1970 participants used to pay 25 piastres per month. Today, the monthly share is 1,000 LE per person. Most of Fatom's participants have become permanent participants. Even when some of the original participants die, their sons or daughters would continue participating in the pool with Fatom. Today in Thomas Wa Afia, there are many women managing such monthly money sharing pools, but Fatom Jaara has the record of the longest running pool.

A month ago (August 2015), when I went to Fatom to offer my condolences for the death of one of her nephews, she told me she is tired of managing the pool and no longer has the energy nor ability to manage it. "The current one will be the last, it's time to put an

end to it after 45 years of working non-stop,” she said. The pool has helped the participants throughout the years to build houses, pay for the expenses of marriage, pay school tuition, and also help in the expenses of the Hajj pilgrimage.

Participants usually use the money they receive for the following purposes:

1. To assist in marriage expenses, which is considered the most common reason that people are involved in such economic systems. Sometimes the money received is not enough to pay for furniture or an apartment. In this case, they might use the money as a down payment.
2. To purchase land to build a house or buy an apartment or refurbish current housing.
3. To pay for tuition fees of schools or universities.
4. To pay for the travel expenses of a trip.
5. To pay for school clothes or new clothes in general.
6. To purchase agricultural land or pay for farming expenses.
7. To buy gold or open up a bank account.
8. To pay for travel expenses for Hajj or Umrah.
9. To help cover costs of surgeries.

There are many examples of people participating in monthly pools. Nuri Khalil, a 73-year-old retired school principal who now farms 10 acres in Abu Simbel, told me that he participated in a pool for 2 LE monthly, and he received 24 pounds. He used this amount of money as a down payment for furniture which cost 80 LE in the early seventies.

The author of this article used the money to buy furniture for his apartment.

Yahiya Mohammed Sharif, a 69-year-old retired government employee, told me he has been participating in pools since 1969, and that he started off by paying 3 LE monthly, and that he used this money to build a house.

My mother, Suad Bahr, is a permanent participant in pools, with different amounts of money that have been used for the cost incurred from two surgeries, for house repairs (plumbing, painting, etc.), for the purchase of new furniture, as well as a TV, a satellite receiver, a water heater, a deep freezer, etc.

Fatima Mohammed Abdel Sayed, my mother-in-law, is another permanent participant in *game'as* organized by Fatom Jaara since 1970. She even went on a pilgrimage after cashing in two shares of the pool.

Taha Zayaar, a 70-year-old retired school principal, used the money he got to go on Umrah to Mecca, and Abboudy Saad put a down payment on a taxi with the money he received.

Monthly Food Sharing

A small group of women, usually 10 to 20, agree to pool some of their monthly staples such as sugar, tea, cooking oil, and soap. They also contribute a small amount of money such as 5–10 LE (less than 2 USD). And each one of them takes turns on a monthly basis in receiving the pooled goods. This monthly food supply sharing system was invented to help provide an amount of food for unusual circumstances or in emergency cases.

Salma, also called Nasra, has been a widow for about ten years, is almost 61 years old, and has two married daughters and three young sons. The oldest son is married and works in Qatar, while the second son works as a cook in Malaysia and the youngest son lives with his mother in the village. Nasra is a grandmother of five children. About five years ago, she found that she has breast cancer and is now receiving chemotherapy in Cairo where she lives with her two daughters. Nasra was managing food supply sharing for more than 15 years. She stopped the management of food supply sharing since she became sick and has now been replaced by another woman from the village. Such community sharing co-ops provide the participants with suitable food amounts for emergency situations such as a death, a marriage, or other occasions. The idea behind pooling, in general, is to help certain individuals with the high cost of daily life as well as unexpected events.

Nasra's husband worked in Qatar for more than two decades. Every annual vacation, he would bring home with him many bags full of clothes (men's, women's, and children's clothes) to sell in their village or other Nubian villages. He used a credit sales system to earn more money. The idea of credit appeared in the late 1980s in Egypt as a result of the high cost of living. The price of each item and the quantity determined the value of the monthly installment. Nasra continued collecting the monthly installment from those who bought items on credit, after her husband returned to Qatar at the end of his annual vacation.

When the Egyptian government desired to have more control over the supply of food using smart subsidized cards, the result was that fewer subsidized foodstuffs became available than previously. This forced people to buy the necessary food from the market at a higher price than subsidized foodstuffs. As a result, women stopped their participation in the food supply sharing co-op.

Community Facilities Sharing

Nubian marriage celebrations bring out the best in the whole community and many friends from other villages. Hospitality demands that during weddings everyone has to be fed well. Preparing food for hundreds or thousands of guests presents huge logistical challenges. For instance, who has 2,000 spoons, 400 large serving trays, or cooking pots large enough to prepare vast quantities of food? No one! To solve this dilemma, Nubian communities join together and share their “banquet” equipment and facilities with people from their village and from other villages who are celebrating weddings.

This system began at the beginning of the fifties of the last century, when there were people or families who were in better financial circumstances than others. They provided large pots for cooking during weddings or other occasions and events like religious ceremonies that drew a large number of people.

After the displacement of Nubians in 1963/1964, distances between villages lessened, and transportation made it easier for guests to attend weddings. Marriage occasions had more guests than before, and it became necessary to establish a system that would provide larger amounts of such things as pots, trays, plates, etcetera, in order to provide and serve food for these larger numbers of guests.

Women were the initiators and developers of this system of compulsory contributions on a monthly basis from each household in the village, in addition to donations and grants that were sent to them from Nubians of the village who work in northern cities and also abroad in the Gulf and in Europe.

This system is managed by someone who must have a number of the most important qualities of a manager, such as the ability to organize large quantities of food and/or objects; good relations with those around her; rigor and firmness in addition to flexibility; and the ability to make quick and effective decisions.

Fethiya Almaz, also called Fethiya Munira, a 70-year-old widow and a mother of three daughters and three sons, the youngest of whom died of an aggressive disease, is a good speaker and a creative Nubian poet. She is also grandmother of a number of boys and girls. Many years ago, I listened to a 90-minute audio cassette recording of Fethiya with her mother Munira Hakom speaking verse after verse and poem after poem about Nubian life.

Many of the villages now have more than one group of women (representing certain streets, families, or villages). For example, in the villages of Thomas Wa Afia – Esna, composed of three main villages and three sub-villages, there are six groups using this system.

The number of guests who will attend a wedding determines how many cooking utensils and food supplies are needed. And if the number of utensils is inadequate, they can use the tools of another group or groups. Sometimes disagreements arise between one group and another. If there is a shortage of utensils, then they are forced to find them from somewhere else.

The system works as follows. When a family has a wedding, the number of expected guests depends on the participation of the person or family on other occasions. If the person or family has gone to many different weddings, he or they can expect that the families who gave these weddings will attend his. He will inform the group responsible for managing the system in his village or his region, and they determine if they already have sufficient service to feed the expected number of guests. If not, they borrow or request additional cooking tools from another village. A few days before the wedding, someone goes to receive cooking utensils according to a list which is written down, with the number and type of each item specified. At the end of the wedding they return it, and if there is a shortage in the number or type of the item, they must pay the value of the missing utensil.

In conclusion, Nubian culture has required that certain systems be created to satisfy the necessary needs of daily life. Each of these three systems fulfills many needs by using local resources without relying on governmental or external aid. Nearly 70% of all Nubians in villages are permanent participants in such pools and approximately 40% of upper Egyptians in Aswan governorate participate in the pool system. In my opinion, this type of pool system was invented to help those that have a low monthly income to buy expensive necessary items like a house, a refrigerator, land, etc. Today in my village, more than 23 pools, with varying amounts of money, are managed by a younger generation who are following in the footsteps of older managers and organizers to help people afford the high cost of living.

These systems could continue or discontinue according to future circumstances. Desperate times call for desperate measures, but wouldn't it be great if in the desperate times that we all have, we would look to our community for help instead of trying to go through it alone.

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